WINTER GREEN

JANET LAING

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WINTERGREEN

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"Where is she?" he demanded

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WINTERGREEN

A TALE OF THE RECONSTRUCTION

BY

JANET LAING

AUTHOR OF

"BEFORE THE WIND," "THE MAN WITH THE LAMP"

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TO

ALL THOSE WHOM IT MAY

CONCERN

THIS

SCRAP OF SECRET HISTORY

IS

DEDICATED

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WINTERGREEN

"The first difficulties to be surmounted will be not economical but emotional."

PROFESSOR SHIELD NICHOLSON,
Inauguration Lecture,
University of Edinburgh,
October, 1919.

WINTERGREEN

CHAPTER I

In which among Other Things some Account is given of a few of the Prehistoric Acts of the Principal Heroine

IT was in the town church of Rathness one fine Sunday morning in the August of 1919 that in the fiftieth year of her age, and in direct answer to prayer, the idea of becoming a domestic servant occurred to Miss Julia Glenferlie. It was the first idea she had ever originated, and when it appeared over the horizon of her mind it fairly took away her breath. It was so ordinary-looking, like a teacupful of poison, and it held likewise such possibilities. Awe-stricken she considered it therefore, while apparently absorbed in the sermon, with her hat tipped over her small keen gray eyes, her shortish nose, and her long upper lip. She was short and stout altogether, giving an impression of strength and sturdiness both of mind and of body. Her own teeth and hair were still sufficient, and she had the complexion of a Ribston pippin. She was plainly but not unfashionably dressed in gray, with touches of brilliant green about her. Green was her color. Her mother's name had been Wintergreen, and it pleased her to wear green always in memory of her.

As she sat there with her eyes fixed on the minister, she was realizing that Providence in vouchsafing this idea had once more sprung a surprise upon her. She recognized it also as the same kind of surprise—sudden and sensational—which she had had several times before.

Perhaps never, she reflected, had there been a woman so peace-loving by nature who had found herself so frequently in vicissitudes of the first magnitude. She remembered specially three of these as she sat there with her gaze fixed.

Her first crisis had overtaken her when she was no more than seven years old. Had she not heard her father predict it, it is probable that she would not have been ready for it. As it happened, however, she had heard him predict it many times and had become, unknown to any one except herself, quite used to the expectation of it. Therefore when she had come upon the laird one day in his so-called study holding a revolver to his forehead, she had immediately grasped the situation. Instinctively also—heredity may account for this—she had realized her father's state of mind at the moment. She had not rushed forward and seized his arm and screamed at him as her mother would have done. She had stood quite still in the doorway and said—"Take care, Daddy! It may be loaded!"

Thus she had saved the head of the house from suicide, for with all his faults and defects the laird had a strong sense of humor, and the aspect of his small fat daughter delivering herself of this speech had been too much for his determination and had sent him into fits of laughter.

On another occasion, when she had been in her teens, she had found herself in a railway carriage—one of the old-fashioned non-corridor kind—alone with a drunken

man, who said he would make her rue the day if there and then she would not kiss him. She had managed to conceal the horror and consternation she had felt at the alternative offered to her, and had merely asked if he would wait till they came out of the tunnel they were then entering so that she might see what she was doing. With shouts of mirth the man had consented to this arrangement, but, at the other end of the tunnel, he had found to his indescribable dismay that one of the carriage doors was swinging wide open, and that he was alone in the compartment. Julia meanwhile had made her way by the footboards along the train to the guard's van, and was already concealed among the luggage there when the danger-signal, frantically pulled, brought the engine to a standstill. As no one ever learned the real facts of the case except the guard and the engine-driver, no one else believed that she had been in the carriage at all, and when her tormentor recovered from his alcoholic state even he did not believe it.

Other events had followed from time to time, made the more remarkable by the long dull intervals between them. Had a contour map of her life's course been drawn it would have been a straight line broken, when it was broken at all, by precipices. The last of these would have been marked on such a map not long before this story opens, when, after an eventless visit of two years spent with quiet cousins in America, she made up her mind to come home in the May of 1915 on the *Lusitania*.

It is unnecessary to recall here what happened. All the world has rung with the echoes of it. But no one probably except those immediately concerned knows how Miss Glenferlie saved the life of Mr. James Macfarlane.

The two had made acquaintance on the evening of the day of starting. They happened to be placed next to each other at dinner, and no one else—for he was singularly unattractive—seemed to be inclined to talk to Mr. Macfarlane. Miss Glenferlie therefore, to whom being unkind was being uncomfortable, allowed him to talk to her. But as he did this, not only during that dinner, but ever after—in season and out of season—she very soon had had enough of him. In vain, however, did she try to shake him off. In vain did she lend him books to distract his unwelcome attention. And she had actually reached the verge of cutting him absolutely dead, when the German torpedo suddenly and inextricably intertwined their destinies.

They had been standing side by side on deck when the water rose all about them, and Miss Glenferlie, with that uncanny self-possession which was hers at such times, had noted even at that dreadful moment how her garrulous companion had been struck speechless. There had been no last words. He had forgotten all about her. Had she not thought of it for herself she would not even have had a life-belt. She had a last impression of him struggling to put on his own, as she slipped off her dripping skirts and swam for dear life. When the great ship sank and dragged her down with it into an abyss of icy darkness, the memory of Macfarlane's trembling hands and pallid loose-lipped countenance accompanied her. And when she rose to the surface again more dead than alive she thought she must be still imagining him, for, clinging to the plank which she had clutched, there he was, pallid cheeks, staring eyes, and everything. He was within a few feet of her, and even as she became

aware of this, he began moving hand over hand towards her.

"Save me," he gurgled. "Save me for the love of God."

There were shrieks all round them, but she only heard his horrible whisper. Awful sights were on every hand, but she only saw him edging nearer. Next moment he might have over-balanced the plank or have gripped her in his insane terror. In either case he would have destroyed them both. But as usual her self-possession served her.

"Keep where you are," she managed to say. "Hold on to the middle of the plank. If you hang on to me I can do nothing for you. But if you keep still I shall try to get opposite to you."

Mercifully he obeyed her. She must indeed have looked a fearsome sight with her teeth chattering like castanets, and her hair afloat like seaweed. She moved along till she was facing him.

"Have you your flask?" she said. She knew he always carried one.

He opened his mouth but he could not speak.

"Keep still and I 'll get it," she said peremptorily.

She was as good as her word, though it cost her a supreme effort.

His saturated pocket clung to the flask like death itself.

Nevertheless a few moments later she had just managed to extract it when to her horror Macfarlane seized it and began draining all the brandy in it.

"You wretch!" she exclaimed. "You selfish wretch! Are you going to leave none for me?"

But it seemed he had again forgotten her.

"You brute!" she whispered, and then she fainted.

From that moment until the night before this story opens, except that she had found his name in the list of passengers saved, Miss Glenferlie had seen or heard nothing more of Mr. Macfarlane.

As though Providence were making up to her for the last great adventure, she had lived for four years in peace and quietness at the Skellicks—her solitary old house set round with Scotch firs—among the fields two miles beyond Rathness. It was the only part of her father's property which he had been able to leave her at his death. The road to it was not much better than a cart-track. The old house itself was dark and gloomy. Except for her adventure, which she refused to mention, its mistress was considered uninteresting. She was left for the most part, therefore, to the companionship of her flowers and her books, and this pleased her very well. Many people, indeed, declared that they did not visit her because they knew she did not desire to be visited by them. A wit in Rathness had once called her the Excluse, because those to whom she was ever "at home" could be counted on the fingers of one hand. This name for her, which became general, was supposed to be specially amusing, because, though her father had been the laird of Glenferlie, her mother before she married him had been his housekeeper.

During the war Miss Glenferlie had knitted a sock a day and spent her money on war-works as lavishly as her father might have done. But she herself had remained withdrawn from it all in her own cozy little boudoir, where, for hours at a time, no sound of the

outer world was heard but the wind in the fir-trees and the sea sighing in the distance.

With the signing of the peace a new era began. There was no more knitting at the Skellicks. But otherwise there was little difference. The money still poured out into the maws of a dozen charities, which had been starved throughout the war and were now clamant for increased subscriptions. Miss Glenferlie, however, could now read without interruption, and she did so almost constantly. There was so much still to be read, she reflected, and so little time to do it in. Her mother had died at sixty, her father at sixty-two. She, herself, was now fifty. She saw herself reading on happily to the end of her life.

Outside problems did not trouble her. She avoided, indeed, all literature that was concerned with the present day. She had heard of reconstruction, of course, and was vaguely glad that it was going on. But it never occurred to her that she personally had anything to do with it. Once her minister had made her uneasy by saying that she must have been spared from the *Lusitania* for some special purpose, but immediately afterwards he had relieved her mind by saying he wanted money for something. She supposed, therefore, that he only meant that she should spend more freely still, and she was glad that spending and reading could go on simultaneously.

It was just then, however, that, though she did not realize it at the time, signs of another precipice began to appear ahead of her. In the spring of the year 1919 Old Roger died. Old Roger had been gardener, coachman, and butler at the Skellicks. It was, as Dalrymple

the cook said, as though there had been three deaths at once. It would have taken three people to replace him, and not one was to be found at anything like the wage which the retainer of thirty years' standing had considered ample payment. Worse than this, Dalrymple, whose temper had never been good, suddenly realized one day that she was being taken advantage of. Others who were mere infants in comparison to her both in years and capabilities were earning as much as she was. She therefore requested her mistress to pay her a wage more suitable to her qualifications or to find another cook.

Three days after this, Dawson, the house lady's maid, after looking pensive for twenty-four hours, began to sigh heavily one evening as she was brushing her mistress's hair. On being asked what was the matter she said that the matter was her wage. If Dalrymple was to get a rise, surely it was only fair that she should get a rise too. Otherwise Dalrymple, whom she cordially disliked, would have the right to lord it over her.

Miss Glenferlie agreed that this must be avoided at all costs. But on debating with herself as to what those costs should be, it seemed to her that further advice than that of Dawson would be useful. Mr. Carrick in Rathness was the family lawyer and banker and an old friend as well. Miss Glenferlie, therefore, wrote to him stating her own case and the case of her domestics.

Mr. Carrick's reply was the third and most ominous sign. He came himself in person to deliver it, and was most kind and sympathetic.

All the sympathy in the world, however, could not alter the fact that Miss Glenferlie's income had been considerably exceeded by her expenditure. Indeed, so much, it seemed, was her account at the bank already

overdrawn that Mr. Carrick himself was financing her until the next substantial dividends should come in to square things up at Christmas. She must see, he explained, how if your resources being what they were, if you gave five pounds to this and five pounds to that and ten pounds to the other, you soon came to the end of your money. Funds, moreover, were lower than they had ever been. Even the substantial dividends he had spoken of might, when they did come in, be mere fractions of what they had been aforetime. Under these circumstances any rise of wages to either of the two servants would be unadvisable, and, as he had been making up his mind for some time to tell her, all her charities must be stopped forthwith.

Mr. Carrick was a dapper little amiable gentleman with a habit of tapping himself nervously with his eyeglasses. He tapped himself more than usual during this address, for something, as he said afterwards to his wife, glimmered in the eyes of his client which he had seen before in the laird's eyes when he was about to burst into one of his torrential rages. Nothing happened, however. All that Miss Glenferlie said was—

"I understand."

Then she talked of other matters. Moreover, she gave him an excellent tea before he set out again on the rough road back to Rathness.

But no sooner had Mr. Carrick taken his departure than his client went into the small room on the upper floor, once called the study and now the boudoir, and set herself grimly to tackle the situation.

As she did so she looked up at a portrait of her mother painted by a friend of the laird's who had lived for some time on his hospitality and had been mothered by

his lady, the erstwhile Jane Wintergreen. It had been the artist's fancy to paint her in an old rose-colored brocade belonging to some former lady of the Skellicks which had been found in a forgotten wardrobe, and the plain sensible face of the ex-housekeeper looked out from under a black lace head-dress adorned with red roses.

The daughter, clothed in something which matched the shadows in the room, seemed herself a shadow beside the flamboyant canvas. Otherwise she might have been looking at her own face in a mirror. Her own image looked back at her, solemn and slightly grim, for the lady of the Skellicks had had her own ado with her laird. She had come to him at the Skellicks when he had already sown the wind and was in process of reaping the whirlwind. His one regret was that she had not come sooner.

"You would have saved the estates, Jane," he had always said. "You would have kept a grip on 'em, old woman."

Certain it was that she had kept a grip on what was left. The Skellicks, such as it was, with all its household gods, many of them heirlooms, had been left in good order to her daughter. She had implanted also in the last descendant of the Glenferlies the same reverence and regard for her belongings that she herself had always felt for them.

"You have in them what money cannot buy," she had said. "They are your inheritance. They have come down to you from an honorable past. Men and women of your own blood have used and seen them and have been proud of them. It is now your duty to keep them well and carefully so that you may hand them on as you have received them."

From this it will be gathered that Jane Wintergreen

had been no ordinary housekeeper. She had been no ordinary mother either.

"I 'll have you taught nothing but what you are likely to need," she had said. "You can't sing a note in tune, so I 'll not have you taught music. I never see you wanting to draw, so I 'll not have you taught drawing. But when your father is tired of teaching you, which will be every other day, I 'll teach you what *I* know. It may be nothing much, but it has served me as well as many a grander education has served grander folks. If it had n't been for it I would n't have been your mother."

Which was true enough.

She taught her Julia then all the secrets of housekeeping, against her Julia's will often, for she was a book-worm by nature. She taught her the secrets of economy, against her will also, for she was a born spendthrift.

Further, she instructed her in what she called the Arts, and the first of these, though she did not call it by that name, was Reticence.

"Don't let folks know all that you know," she said. "Your father has given you learning, but if you take my advice you 'll keep quiet about it, hide it away, tuck it into the middle of you. It will come through all right as the flavor comes through a pudding."

The second Art was what she called Attention.

"It 's not the women that talk," she would say, "and that are always showing off that get on. It 's the women that take time to notice things. Above all, it 's the women that listen."

These words came into Julia's mind as she sat that evening looking up at the portrait. It seemed to her as though her mother were even now urging her to listen,

endeavoring to advise her from some higher sphere of influence. She remembered how in that very room she had so often admonished and advised her father. She sat fascinated, looking up, but no definite message came to her. Her mind kept circling like a squirrel in a wheel. All the usual expedients occurred to her and were rejected. She would never let the Skellicks, and go into rooms in Rathness. She would rather do anything than hand over the household gods to strangers. She realized, nevertheless, that something must be done. She had pledged herself to send money to half a dozen people before Christmas. And if she had to pay wages and keep herself and her household as befitted her position in life, she could not do so without appealing to Mr. Carrick. On her mother's side she had no connections except those far-off cousins in America who looked upon her as their rich relation. Her father's family had had no dealings with him after what they termed his mésalliance. To humiliate herself before any of them was quite out of the question. Yet no other way out of her difficulties had been revealed to her when the evening post interrupted her.

CHAPTER II

In which the Historic Adventures of the Principal Heroine begin

DAWSON brought up the letter—for there was only one—partly because it was her duty to do so, and partly because she wanted to reconnoiter. Dalrymple and she, now joined by a common interest, had, since the lawyer left, been awaiting developments. As time had passed on, however, and nothing had happened, a change had come over the spirit of their dream. It did not occur to them that their mistress could dispense with their services, but they began to think that there might be some difficulty in getting her to see eye to eye with them. The question therefore now was whether, if their wages were not raised sufficiently, they should or should not stay on at the Skellicks. In this connection they remembered various advantages of their present situation which they could not be sure of finding elsewhere.

"When ye 've been a long time in a place," said Dawson, who was inclined to be sentimental, "ye canna help gettin' a kind o' fond o' 't."

While she spoke her gaze wandered round the kitchen which had once been the pride and delight of Jane Wintergreen, and which still retained from beyond the years something of the impress of her personality.

"She never grudges," Dawson went on, referring to the present owner. "She likes ye to tea an' supper a'

body that comes. Ye wouldna get that in some places."

"Hoots ay," said Dalrymple. "They 're that desperate to keep ye noo they 'd crawl on their knees to please ye. Jess Kirk was tellin' me the ither day she 'd as mony folk in every day as she liked an' her mistress never says a word."

"Does she no'?' said Dawson. "Weel, weel! A' the same I 'd be sweer to leave Miss Glenferlie. She kens what guid wark is an' she can show ye things hersel'. If she 's willin' to gi'e a rise at a', I 'll bide till I ha' time to look aboot me onyway."

"Ye 'd better," said Dalrymple. "In some o' they hooses whaur they pay a ransom they tell me it 's because they ha' to dae 't to keep the maids frae rinnin' awa' again whenever they see their kitchens."

"Aweel," said Dawson, "rise or nae rise I 'm thinkin' I 'll stay on till Christmas."

"I 'll no' say that," said Dalrymple, "but I 'll no' be onreasonable. I 'll tak' the long time she has been my mistress into conseederation."

"Ay, that 's but fair," said Dawson, and she might have said a good deal more had not the door-bell rung just then and obliged her to go and open it to the post-man.

When she returned from taking up the letter, however, Dalrymple was waiting for her with some eagerness.

"Aweel?" she said as soon as Dawson appeared. "Aweel, did she say onything?"

"No' a word," said Dawson. "She was sittin' in the dark there lookin' gey bethochtet-like."

"Bethochtet?" exclaimed Dalrymple. "Ah, then she 'll be comin' forrit."

"I wouldna wonder," said Dawson. "I said I would

bide on whether or no', but there 's nae use dashin' at things, an' it 's my opeenion, noo that I 've seen her, that if we staund firm she 'll jist gi'e what we ask for."

"Then the thing to dae," said Dalrymple, "is jist to staund by ane anither."

"That 's the plan," agreed Dawson. "Efter a', when ye can get it what for should ye no' tak' it?"

Miss Glenferlie had moved over to the window where the last of the sunset light still lingered, and had sat down to read her letter.

For some time after that there was absolute silence. Then suddenly and faintly:

"Lord help me!" she ejaculated.

To save time and tedium it will be best here to give the letter.

It was dated from a London hotel.

"Dear Miss Glenferlie," it ran. "It is with an emotion which I can hardly repress sufficiently to hold my pen that I sit down after the lapse of four years to let you know that I have now quite recovered from the effects of the *Lusitania* disaster. I need not harrow your feelings with details nor rend your heart with an account of my subsequent sufferings. All I need say until we meet to exchange experiences and revive old memories is that no sooner was I cured sufficiently to leave hospital than I at once set out to find you. I never met any one who understood me as you do, never any one with whom I could converse so freely. It was only yesterday, however, that I found your address in a book you lent me and which must have been in my pocket when the disaster happened.

"What thoughts the sight of it conjured up! But I wish to forestall nothing. I only write this to tell you that I have ascertained by telephone that at the hotel at Rathness they can give me a room next Friday, also that you are still alive and at the same address. I cannot tell you how relieved I was to hear this, because I had heard nothing of what had happened to you from the moment when we stood together on the deck and you said: 'What was that?' when the torpedo struck. Since then, up till a few days ago, I have been in the unfortunate position of my mind being absolutely blank. Now, however, it is filled with the thought of you. Till Friday then, when you shall see me as soon as may be after my arrival.

"Yours ever in the bonds of the awful past,

"JAMES ANDERSON MACFARLANE."

Miss Glenferlie had read this letter over twice before she took it in, in all its bearings. She did so then, however, and it was at this point that she gave vent to her ejaculation.

So this, she reflected bitterly, was what had come to her because her mother had taught her to be a good listener. This was the result of being kind. The more you did for some people, it seemed, the more you were expected to do. As if it were not enough to have saved this man's life, he now evidently expected her to be delighted to receive him whenever he should choose to visit her. And by a chance that was nothing less than diabolical he had forgotten all the circumstances of their last meeting, when he had clung to the plank more like a terrified animal than a rational human being. If he had had any recollection at all of the way in which he had

treated her, drinking off the brandy which she had meant for them both, surely even he, impossible as he was, would not have dared again to approach her. But there it was. His mind at that point was blank. Had there ever been anything so unfortunate? And now again he was coming hand over hand, groping into her life as he had groped his way along the plank. The very thought of him made her shudder—not so much the thought of him hideous, abject, half-drowned, as she had last seen him, but the thought of him at the Rathness Hotel in his enormous checks and his pink silk neckties. She imagined him flourishing his diamond rings in the smoking-room, and claiming her as an intimate friend, as he would be sure to do.

He had attached himself to her on board ship and he would doubtless attach himself to her now, making her the talk of the whole neighborhood. And how they would talk! With what zest! With what relish! Miss Glenferlie's young man! Miss Glenferlie's admirer! She could hear them.

On the other hand, to refuse him admission to the Skellicks to repudiate him altogether, seemed impossible. It was evident that his mind was in a precarious state. Any violent disappointment might plunge it once more into the sea of blankness from which it had just emerged. She realized this with a sinking of the heart, for just as it had never occurred to her on that former dreadful occasion to push him off the plank into the Atlantic, so now for fear of what might be the consequences she never thought of refusing to see him. It was just at this point, however, that the plan of evacuating a position which had become untenable first occurred to her. But it only made her feel worse than before as realization

came to her that she was hemmed in by lack of money. Moreover, from what she already knew of Mr. Macfarlane it was certain that wherever she went he would follow her. He had found her address before. He would find it again.

That night she dreamed, when she slept at all, that an old man of the sea was strangling her with a pink silk necktie.

The next day was Sunday, but she was in no mood to go to church. Once there, however, it occurred to her that prayer might help her. She prayed therefore so fervently all through the first hymn and prayer and the Old Testament lesson that a woman behind thought she must be ill and touched her on the shoulder.

At this she sat up, and, being provided with an open hymn-book by her solicitous friend behind, she was endeavoring to fix her attention upon it when over the page her eye was caught and held by a little picture unobtrusively placed in the corner of a stained glass window opposite. The picture was of Jesus in the house of Martha and Mary. Martha was depicted as standing at a table baking, and, for the first time, though she had seen the picture often before, the resemblance of Martha's homely face to that of her own mother struck her. She had seen her mother so, many a time, when she was baking in the kitchen at the Skellicks. The morning sunshine falling through the colored glass was setting the little scene aglow, and to the tired woman the picture of that old-time home seemed to be illuminated with the light of her own childhood. Again, as on the night before, a vivid realization of her mother's presence came to her. This time, however, she saw her not in

the rose-colored brocade, but in her old-fashioned working-garments.

They still hung in a wardrobe at the Skellicks. Till the day of her death the lady of the house had preserved them.

"No; they are part of the happiest days of my life," she had said once, when her daughter had suggested sending them to a sale of jumbles.

The daughter thought of these words now when she ought to have been thinking of other things. Her mother had been happiest as a servant. Though like Martha she had been careful and troubled about many things then, it had not been about her own affairs. It had not been about the larger responsibilities. She had had her orders, and she had carried them out with all their might, taking a daily pleasure in the work of her own hands, in the comfort of others—in the perfection of her skill.

How much better she had been as the housekeeper of the Skellicks than she had been afterwards as its mistress, with clothes and food to provide for a whole household, with wages to pay, with endless calls at all times upon her reserves of tact and patience!

How often she must have longed for the comfortable solitude of her housekeeper's room again, for the quiet hours of leisure she had found there, unbroken by her laird's complainings. There she had been undisturbed by sordid anxieties, unworried by social obligations. With what regret she must have contemplated her past sometimes, wishing herself back once more on the old plane, haunted by it as by some fourth dimension, always tantalizingly close at hand, yet impossible of attainment!

But at this point in her meditations Miss Glenferlie

felt her mind for a moment stop thinking altogether. Like Mr. Macfarlane's it became an absolute blank, so that a space must have been left in the continuity of its workings like that which one finds before the beginning of a new paragraph.

And then—all at once—out of nothing—out of everything—the realization suddenly emerged that the way which had been barred to her mother was not barred to her; that there was nothing to hinder her from withdrawing herself whenever she pleased from her present predicament; that there was nothing to prevent her from becoming what her mother had been and had been proud to be—a domestic servant.

No wonder she looked awe-stricken as she sat there in contemplation of this simple yet complete solution of all her difficulties. For there it was, ready-made, and so obvious that the only wonder was that she had not before thought of it. Her mental struggles and perturbations of the night before seemed in face of her discovery so ridiculous that she smiled broadly and suddenly, and then laughed softly, to the scandal and consternation of her friend behind.

The apparently insurmountable obstruction in her path had disappeared like that Himalayan torrent over which one night an explorer with terrific difficulty transported his whole cavalcade, only to find it dry next morning.

All her worries had vanished into thin air. She would not need to be unkind to a half-demented invalid. She would need no more large supplies of money. She would need no more servants. She would not need to let the house. She would need no clothes beyond those which her mother had worn. Even her nom de guerre was ready for her—her mother's name—Jane Wintergreen. She

would not need to stint her charities. She would not need to return to ordinary life until she had squared things up generously not only with them but with Mr. Carrick.

No sooner did the "Scotsman" arrive the next morning at the Skellicks than Miss Glenferlie seized upon it, and in about five minutes she had fixed upon the following advertisement:

"Wanted immediately a cook-housekeeper for doctor's house. Wages £52. Liberal outings. Four in family. Apply Mrs. Adair, The Bow House, Cauldstanes, Eastshire."

In response to this she wrote immediately and posted with her own hands the following application:

"Mrs. Adair.

"Madam: I beg to apply for the post of cook-housekeeper advertised in to-day's 'Scotsman.' I am unable to give any guarantee of respectability except my own assurance that I have been thoroughly trained in housework of all kinds, and that I have usually succeeded in accomplishing what I have undertaken to do. In lieu of reference I offer to pay my railway fare and to arrive in Cauldstanes by to-morrow evening, when I hope that you will grant me an interview.

"Yours truly,

"JANE WINTERGREEN."

Ideas generate ideas, and when it came to her actual departure the new Wintergreen's mind was running so smoothly that everything went like oiled clockwork.

The manner of her going deserves record as an ex-

ample—if economy of sensation be taken into account—of one of the most entirely successful domestic manœuvers of the period.

What happened was this.

On the Wednesday evening Mr. Carrick, returning from his office late, found a letter lying waiting for him, addressed in Miss Glenferlie's familiar handwriting. It had been left, the maid explained, by an elderly woman of respectable exterior so far as she could judge in the dusk, who was dressed in black and closely veiled, and who had handed it over in silence and then departed.

Mr. Carrick read the letter on the spot.

"Dear Mr. Carrick," it ran. "This is to let you know that I am leaving the Skellicks for a time, and that even if I do not return for many months there will be no need for anxiety. I have given orders that in the meantime all my correspondence is to be handed to you, and I now ask you to deal with it and with all other business as you think fit. I do not wish the house to be shut up. But I wish the two servants to be dismissed. They had both virtually given notice so that there will be no need to pay them more than a month's wages. My old friends the Clackmannans, who were in charge while I was in America, and who know how a house should be kept, will be delighted to be installed again at the lodge at any wage you suggest.

"With kind regards and thanking you in advance, I remain, yours sincerely,

"Julia Glenferlie."

Mr. Carrick on reading this went at once into his study and rang the bell.

"Who did you say brought this?" he said when the maid entered.

He tapped the letter with his eye-glass.

"An old woman, did you say?" he added.

"Yes, sir," said the maid.

"A stranger?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well keep some supper for me," said Mr. Carrick, "and tell Mrs. Carrick that I shall be back in an hour or so. I have to go out now."

A few minutes later he was on his way to the Skellicks, and soon the astonished Dawson was opening the door to him.

"Is Miss Glenferlie in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Dawson, wondering, for it was dark night outside.

He was ushered into the dining-room, where a bright wood fire was burning and preparations made for a dainty meal. But he had not sat long there listening intently, before the silence of the house was disturbed by sounds of scurry here and there. Doors opened and closed. Footsteps could be heard on the stairs—agitated whisperings in the hall outside.

"I thought so," said Mr. Carrick to himself.

Then the door of the dining-room opened again, and Dawson, rather paler than usual, appeared.

"The mistress is not there, sir," she said in a perturbed voice. "She must have gone out or something."

"Does she generally go out at this hour?" said Mr. Carrick.

"Never sir," said Dawson, "and she was in at tea-time for I took her tea up to the boudore. Oh, sir, can anything have happened to her?"

"No, no," said Mr. Carrick, determined to avert if possible even the beginnings of a nine days' wonder. "You will be glad to hear that there is no need for anxiety. I had not expected that Miss Glenferlie had already started, but I knew that she was going away."

"Going away, sir?" ejaculated Dawson.

"Going away?" echoed another voice from the doorway.

Mr. Carrick, looking up, met the round eyes of Dalrymple fixed upon him in blank dismay.

Perturbed as he was himself, he yet appreciated the tableau.

"Yes, going away," he said with a gravity which he found it difficult to preserve, "and I have been instructed to tell you that your mistress has given up her situation."

CHAPTER III

Which begins with a Mystery and ends with a Revelation

WHATEVER satisfaction Mr. Carrick may have felt in turning the tables upon her servants, he was by no means satisfied in his own mind that all was well with Miss Glenferlie. As he tramped back to Rathness along the windy road, his mind was full of the letter she had written, and the more he thought of it the more it seemed to him mysterious and extraordinary.

By the time he reached home he was very much worried. Mrs. Carrick was sitting up for him. He found her by the drawing-room fire deep in one of Mrs. Belloc Lowndes's novels.

"I only hope she has n't done for herself," he said to her. "She may have inherited the tendency from the laird. He was always threatening to 'go out' as he called it, and she has never been quite the same since the *Lusitania.*"

"But what should she commit suicide for?" said Mrs. Carrick.

"We had a talk the other day about money matters," replied her husband, "and I told her she had overdrawn her account, and that she must, for a time at least, stop giving money to charities. She may have taken this too much to heart."

"No, I don't think so," said Mrs. Carrick, laying aside

"The Chink in the Armor" as she spoke. "If she had been going to do that she would n't have written this letter and all those directions about what was to be done till she came back. No, if she 's dead, it is much more likely that she has been murdered."

Mrs. Carrick said the last words in a whisper, looking over her shoulder as she spoke.

"Murdered?" exclaimed the lawyer. "For heaven's sake don't say that, Mary!"

"Well, you asked my opinion," said Mrs. Carrick, "and it 's this—the woman who brought the letter was the murderess."

"Oh nonsense!" exclaimed her husband. "Is it likely she would so expose herself?"

"So far as I have heard she did *not* expose herself," said his wife. "She came in the dusk and thickly veiled, too; did n't she?"

"Yes," said Mr. Carrick, "but——"

"Very well," interrupted his wife, "the first things I would make sure of would be: is or is not that letter forged?"

"Forged?" exclaimed Mr. Carrick.

"Yes, forged," said his wife. "Is it a genuine letter or is it a red herring drawn across the track?"

"Really, Mary," said Mr. Carrick, "you do get the strangest notions!"

"I may or I may not," said Mary. "But how can you be sure that this letter *is* from Miss Glenferlie?"

"Because I know her handwriting," said Mr. Carrick, taking the letter once more out of his pocket and examining it. "I know the way she strokes her t's and dots her i's."

"And so do other people perhaps," said his wife. "She

has a very characteristic handwriting, and that is always the easiest kind to imitate. Besides, you must admit that the letter is very strange. There are queer gaps in it. If she is going away for months, does it not seem unnatural that she should leave no address; not even with you, her confidential lawyer? Why should she cut herself off from everybody like that?"

"She will be sending the address," said Mr. Carrick.

"She does n't say she will, anyhow," said his wife: "and another queer thing; she does n't ask for a penny of money. Now if—as you say—her bank account is overdrawn—how is she going to get it if you do not advance it? Will she overdraw more?"

"Oh, no, she won't do that," said Mr. Carrick. "She has a horror of overdrawing. And she knows she can borrow from me."

"Yet she has not done so. That seems queer, does n't it? Going away for months without a penny in her pocket."

"She must have a few pounds left."

"Well—a few pounds—and with no destination given. Really, Edward, if I were you I should be very uneasy."

"So I am," said Edward irritably. "But what on earth can I do? After all I have no business to raise a hue and cry after her. She might be furious if I did. All I can do is to behave as if everything were all right."

"But what if it 's not all right?" persisted Mary. "What if she is lying somewhere buried in the grounds while her murderers are making off with her valuables and we are sitting here allowing them to escape?"

"We can easily make sure about the valuables, anyhow," said the lawyer, "without any outsider being mixed up in it. There is an inventory in the office which was

made by her mother and brought by Miss Glenferlie herself up to date. When the servants have gone to-morrow I will go over everything myself before the Clackmannans take over charge."

It was past midnight when they came to this conclusion, and Mr. Carrick, more at ease in consequence, betook himself to rest.

After all, he remarked to his wife from the recesses of his dressing-room, why should a woman of Miss Glenferlie's age not be at liberty to do what she liked? Surely, also, if she chose to go off in an unusual manner her lawyer could not be held responsible.

His wife's reply from her pillow was:

"No, so long as she *did* go off."

Which, as her husband said next morning, was very inconsiderate of Mrs. Carrick, and caused him to dream all night of finding corpses among Scotch fir-trees.

When the new Jane Wintergreen's letter of application arrived the next afternoon at Cauldstanes, two notable inhabitants of that ilk, Miss Clara and Miss Lydia Fortescue, were seated at their drawing-room window overlooking the Bow House. This must not be taken to mean that they themselves were visible while they occupied this coign of vantage. White lace curtains hung between them and publicity. None the less, between the white palm leaves and roses of the design, a clear view was easily obtainable of the large three-storied mansion across the street. It was built of dark freestone, which gave it rather a gloomy look, and bulged in the center into the bow from which it took its name. It stood withdrawn from the other houses behind a small roughly paved courtyard, and was divided from the street by an iron

railing with a gate on which was Dr. Adair's brass plate.

It was a dull afternoon, with showers of rain. The narrow High Street had a dreary and forlorn appearance. Straws and pieces of paper were blowing about, but hardly any one passed. The Bow House itself had a depressed and deserted look. Its brasses were dim and spotted with drops of rain. The lamp which hung from the arch above the gate was dirty and neglected-looking. The whole house seemed to blink disconsolately at the passers-by from behind its half-drawn yellow blinds as though sinking from sheer ennui and downheartedness into an uncomfortable sleep.

But to the two women opposite there was nothing dull or depressing about it. No stage, no arena, could have been of more absorbing interest. The very unpromisingness of its appearance was in their eyes an added attraction. It gave a certain piquancy to its dramatic possibilities.

The two Miss Fortescues were twins, and the physical differences between them were hardly noticeable. They had narrow wrinkled oblong faces rather like pale dates, thin-lipped mouths, dark beady eyes, and scanty hair done up in top-knots. Their clothes were mainly remarkable for the material which had been saved in their making, and for the time which had obviously elapsed since they had been made. Of the two Clara was the more modern and luxurious. A tendency to bronchitis prevented her going out when there was an east wind. As this was almost always she spent most of her time indoors, and also always wore large shawls which gave her a more elegant and draped appearance than her sister. She was besides what was known in Cauldstanes as a character. Her face had the grim expression, relaxing

occasionally into sardonic smiles, which is supposed to be associated with detective ability, and she had such a talent for finding out things about her neighbors that for want of material it often made material for itself. She was in short one of that large and too much ignored army of born novelists and dramatists who neither read nor write.

"Though I wish to goodness she would," said Mr. Pennifeather, the parish minister, "instead of dabbling in real life and complicating it the way she does."

He disliked her presence, even in the church, and was glad when it was too cold or too wet for her to appear there.

"But how unchristian of you, James," said his sister once when he told her this.

"I know it is," said James. "Yet even Christ was a little unchristian about some people."

Clara's public appearances, however, were few and far between.

Lydia did the shopping, the district visiting, the calling for her. Lydia went to meetings, to tea-parties, to garden-parties. Lydia, as her sister was wont to say, was the social one, but never surely did social butterfly flutter with worse grace or more unwillingly.

"For one thing I look as though I had come out of the ark," she said once to Clara when asked the reason of her repugnance to going to a tennis-party. She was standing at the moment before a mirror putting on a toque which Clara had just trimmed for her.

"So long as you look like a lady, Lydia, that is of no consequence," said Clara firmly.

"And I never know what to say," Lydia continued. "Nobody wants to speak to me. I am so uninteresting."

"All the better," Clara had replied, "you can listen. And since no one speaks to you, you will not be told not to repeat anything."

Such an injunction indeed would have been a calamity to both sisters. The fact that she could thereby obtain news for Clara was the sole thing that made Lydia's sorties into the society of Cauldstanes endurable to her. While seated generally speechless and often ignored in corners she would be noting in her mind all the items of gossip which came within her range of hearing, and this private entertainment served not only to pass the weary hours, but insured her a warm welcome on her return. It gave her a sense of power which she otherwise would have missed to remember that Clara would be wandering about the house wearying for her or sitting at the drawing-room window watching for her first appearance round the corner of the street. There was temptation in this expectation of Clara's also. When there was nothing interesting to relate Lydia would be tempted to invention, so disappointed was her sister when she brought nothing home to her. Had she had her sister's gifts she would undoubtedly have invented.

Fortunately for her veracity, however, Lydia had no gifts. But she had often sorely felt the want of them, and it had been a distinct relief when about four years previously the new young doctor had come with his new young wife to the Bow House opposite. The spring day when they arrived was a red-letter one in the history of the Fortescues. Instead of going out to glean painfully a few meager items to bring home to the waiting Clara, it was Clara now who had things to tell when Lydia returned from her tea-parties. A strong source of interest was now ever present in front of their own

drawing-room windows. Clara required no other entertainment than to keep watch upon the Bow House. From the first evening when with sympathetic thrills she watched the handsome young doctor laughingly lift his wife over the threshold, life for her had held a new and keen interest. Hardly an exit or entrance during the hours of daylight escaped her. The sound of the motor morning, noon, and night would bring her, if she was awake, to the window.

Little did Alice, the bride over the way, think of the audience that was almost invariably present when she ran to the door to meet her husband or threw her arms round his neck when he said farewell. Behind her curtains Clara reveled in all those little intimate scenes. Of nights too she would often come and sit in the dark, when Lydia was asleep and snoring, to watch the light, and sometimes the shadows on the blind, in the bedroom window opposite.

But, strangely enough, it was Lydia who first proposed to call on the young bride. Clara's impersonal and spectatorial attitude had aroused Lydia's subconscious sympathy. Without being aware of it and without knowing why, she was sorry for the young doctor and his wife. She called, therefore, and immediately fell in love with Alice's prettiness and naturalness. She came back to Clara full of Mrs. Adair's attractions, her rose-bloom complexion, her forget-me-not eyes, her hair the color of ripe corn, her beautiful figure, her delightful manner, her kindliness, her charm.

"And I 've asked her to tea on Thursday," she concluded.

Thursday was Clara's official day at home, when the best silver tea-set and the Rockingham cups were set out,

and various people dropped in, partly because they liked a good tea, partly from neighborliness, and partly to ask for Clara. Clara, in her best shawl, sat enthroned in an armchair talking and listening at her ease, while Lydia, harassed and dishevéled often, did the waiting and entertaining on the material side, with the aid of her younger guests and a small erratic servant.

On the day of Mrs. Adair's first visit, which happened to be the last of July, 1914, quite a large party had assembled in the Fortescues' drawing-room to meet her. She had been a great success. Every one had been as delighted with her as Lydia had been. Even Mrs. Rutherford of Longshaws, who was rather difficult, had called next day upon her. The bride and her handsome, capable young husband had been both in a fair way to become very popular, both socially and professionally, when the war, closing down upon them as upon many other young things, put an end to their first careless rapture.

He offered for service in the R.A.M.C., was called up at once, and before Cauldstanes realized what was happening was on his way to India, leaving the fair Alice disconsolate at the Bow House. If she could have gone away too as a V.A.D. or a W.A.A.C. it would have been better for her. But a sister-in-law, whose husband had also been called up, came to stay with her for a week, and became suddenly very ill. Before she had recovered sufficiently to take her departure, years had passed, and the war was all but over.

By this time the Fortescues, Lydia openly, Clara secretly, had come to be of importance in Alice Adair's life. Her other friends in Cauldstanes had all been too preoccupied or too busy to care much about her in her seclusion after the first weeks. Not so Clara and Lydia.

It had become a habit with Clara to watch her. Lydia, even if she had not wanted to go over to the Bow House, would have been urged thereto by her sister, and with her too it had become a habit to come and go there at all times. She had often helped to nurse the sister-in-law. She had sat up at nights to let Alice sleep. She had become an intimate of the house. And when the news at last came that the war was over, that Jack was demobilized, and that he was actually on his way home from India again, it came as a distinct blow to Lydia.

"Of course I can't expect her to want me now," she confided to Clara as she brushed her hair one night.

"Ah, how do we know that?" said Clara. "She may want you more than ever"

"Oh, surely not," exclaimed Lydia. "They're devoted to one another."

"She's devoted to *him,* you mean," said Clara. "You're tugging, Lydia. That is a very different thing from being devoted to one another."

At those words, which were uttered in a tone impossible to ignore, Lydia stopped combing altogether.

"Clara, if you have heard anything, say it out," she said, fixing her scared eyes upon her sister's face in the mirror.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Lydia, I *have* heard something," said Clara. "Sarah Rutherford was in this afternoon when you were out. She just left before you came in, and she has been hearing strange things about him from India."

"Oh, Clara!" exclaimed Lydia, horrified. "What things? Mr. Pennifeather was just telling me to-day that he had been doing so well there. Some one at the

hospital at Alimara had written to him saying that he had been perfectly splendid. Don't say——"

"My dear Lydia, I 'm not saying he has n't been splendid, am I?" said Clara. "All I 'm saying is that he has been having a good time too, apparently. A Miss Carmyle there, the niece of the commissioner at Alimara, and he have made themselves the talk of the place. Sarah is annoyed because the girl is a ward of her husband's though she has never seen her because she refused all their invitations before she left for India. They were too dull for her, she supposes. The friend—Mrs. Crowley, who wrote to her from Alimara—says she is a regular little flirt, and that it is a mercy that Dr. Adair is leaving."

It may be imagined how Mrs. Rutherford's news altered the conditions of the Fortescues' intercourse with the Bow House. Clara found inexhaustible food for conversation with Lydia in the contemplation of what was likely to happen on the return of its absent master. Lydia could hardly sleep at nights for sympathy with Alice, now busy and happy and all unconscious of doom, in the midst of preparations for her Jack's arrival. It was heart-rending to Lydia to see her working cheerfully about the house, paler than of yore, worn with watching and anxiety, but young still and eager and with gay confidence in life.

"We have n't had time to tire of each other, Jack and I," she said once when she came over to tea, and Clara, with her beady eyes upon her, bemoaned the long absence of her husband. "When other people who were married at the same time will be settling down to stodginess we shall be just beginning again."

"Poor thing!" Clara said afterwards.

"Had n't I better warn her?" said Lydia in great distress.

"By no means!" said Clara sharply. "It is none of our business."

"Anything that affects her will always be my business, Clara," said Lydia, "and if I thought it would spare her anything——"

"Don't be a fool now, Lydia Fortescue," said Clara.

The essence of the interest of the situation to her lay, of course, in Alice's ignorance. From the spectator's point of view the whole dénouement would have been spoiled had Lydia been allowed to carry out her charitable project. And it is likely—such was her habit of deference to her sister—that she would never have carried it out had not something else happened which changed even Clara's opinion.

This was weeks later. Jack had been home for months, and, contrary to expectation, nothing sensational had accompanied his homecoming. He had arrived late one evening. Alice had met him at the station, and they had come back to the Bow House together in the dusk.

Lydia, feeling rather forlorn, had nevertheless abstained from going over that night according to custom, and this although Clara pressed her to do so.

"No, I will *not*," she had said with unwonted vehemence, and she had adhered to her decision.

She had been over often since, however, but to Clara's disappointment she had brought back with her absolutely nothing of interest.

Nothing at all had happened which might not have happened in any case. The young couple, if a little older, a little more staid in their demeanor, a little more sub-

dued in their manner toward each other, seemed as happy as they had ever been. Their only troubles seemed to be outside ones. They were worried by domestics like other people, and when the boarder came they were worried by the boarder.

His name was Arthur Gardshore, and he had been sent to Jack Adair by a friend of his father's—a professor of psychology—who toward the end of the war had found him in a shell-shock hospital where no treatment of any kind was having the least effect upon him. He had come there from a general hospital where he had been cured of desperate wounds, but some obscure lesion was still suspected. Nothing could arouse in him the smallest desire to go on living. Some fundamental source of his vitality seemed to have been injured. Every one had tried his hand on him without result. It was not convenient to keep him at the shell-shock hospital any longer. Change of environment had therefore been prescribed, but, having no friends he wanted to go to, and no initiative, the patient had become a problem in every sense of the word, when Jack's father's friend had appeared upon the scene. He at once took a fancy to the derelict because of a certain grim humor which showed itself occasionally through the man's enveloping gloom, and because of a strange Barbellion-like power of self-detachment and self-criticism which manifested itself in him from time to time. The professor desired to see more of him. He invited him to return with him to his home, and there he kept him under observation until he was about to be called away to government research work. It was necessary to find a temporary home for Gardshore, and Jack Adair had at once occurred to the professor. In the early days of their life at Cauldstanes,

he had spent a memorable week with him and his Alice, and had a picture still in his mind of their pre-war comfort and happiness. Cauldstanes, he reflected, would be a complete change for Gardshore, and contact with this sane healthy young couple would do him as much good as the sea air. He therefore wrote to Jack by the next post. Gardshore, he told them, was about thirty, of good family, and with plenty of money for all his wants. He had led a strenuous life before the war had destroyed him, and had had many friends before he cast them off.

"At present he has no interest in anything," the professor added. "Yet I know from my investigations in his case that once he was an engineer and keen on his work. What is the cause of his persistent depression I have been so far unable to discover. But we specialists, according to the latest theories, are too ready to attribute everything to our own specialties. This is the day of the general practitioner. Take my patient then for six weeks and see if you can reconstruct him, or tell me how to do it."

Jack had leaped for joy when he received this letter.

"It 's the very thing I wanted," he had said to Alice, to keep me from getting out of everything in this place."

And Alice had sympathized, though wondering a little at this speech. Jack had never before spoken of his home as "this place." But she had rejoiced too at the addition to their income which the patient would bring with him. Expenses were heavy, and Jack was making a fresh start. She received the guest with cordiality, therefore. But cordiality, it seemed, was the last thing that melancholy shadow of a human being wanted. He regarded all her efforts to please him and make him feel at home out of

eyes which were always forbidding and often hostile. Next morning he absolutely refused to come downstairs, and Jack apparently could do nothing with him.

"No, of course I can't," he had said a little testily when she had taken him to task about it. "I didn't expect to either, until I had observed him and seen what was the matter with him."

Again, after a few days—

"We must leave him to himself," he had said. "We must leave him to come to himself."

After a fortnight it had still been the same. Gardshore, Jack ordained, was to do exactly as he liked. And he liked apparently to remain in his two rooms upstairs, thereby, to Alice's mind, casting a slur upon her and the remainder of her house. Gradually she came to hate him, to hate his manner of ringing his bell, and the plaintive way in which he made the most inconvenient requests from his upper landing. She hated, also, the way in which he kept Jack talking to him every night for hours in his room while she sat downstairs in solitude.

"But, my dear, I must attend to him," Jack had said when she spoke to him about this. "I must attend to him like any other patient. I am being paid to do it."

"But will he ever be better?" Alice had sighed.

"Of course he will," Jack had replied. "With all due deference to these shell-shock people, I am convinced that the whole thing is now being caused by his liver. I am putting him through a course of alteratives now which will soon set him all right. In the meantime we must keep up his spirits all we can. If we even half cure him here he may make our fortune. He may be the first of many patients who may come to us from outside."

But Alice, though she did not say so except to Lydia

in confidence, thought that this patient would cure her of ever wanting to have another in the house. He was the most difficult person she had ever had to deal with. He took no notice of any of the conditions of life. He was never ready for meals. He never got up in the mornings. He often sat up all night. He was absolutely regardless of arrangements. His invariable deference and politeness were no alleviation of this. They made things worse if anything. One could not storm at him as one might have done. Already, though he had been there such a short time, he had driven the new char-woman distracted. She had announced several times already that either she or Mr. Gardshore must clear out. This would have been nothing, for she was a hateful woman, if they could have got any one to take her place, but not another soul was to be had in Cauldstanes or anywhere else for love or money.

All this, or something like this, was in the minds of the two Miss Fortescues as they sat in their drawing-room window watching the Bow House on the afternoon of the arrival of Wintergreen's application. All this and more —much more. For at last a really sensational thing had happened, which for the last hour they had been discussing.

"And now I agree with you, Lydia," said Clara, "that some warning should be given."

Lydia's face blanched but grew very determined.

"I 'm glad you think so, Clara," she said. "I should have felt obliged to give the warning now in any case."

She rose as she spoke, nervously tucking a strand of faded hair behind her ear.

"Don't be long," said Clara. "I shall be anxious till you come back."

"You may be sure," Lydia returned, "that I shall be no longer than I can help, Clara."

. . . . . .

She found Alice in her dining-room with the letter from Wintergreen in her hand.

"I have had such splendid news," she exclaimed. Then she stopped short. "What's the matter?" she said, interrupting herself.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," said Lydia hastily, again with trembling hand tucking up her strand of hair.

"But there is: I am sure of it," said Alice anxiously. "Nothing has happened to Jack, has there? You are n't going to break something to me?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed Lydia, disconcerted. "There—there is really nothing the matter. It 's just that a Miss Carmyle from Alimara is coming to-morrow to stay with the Rutherfords; that's all."

"A Miss Carmyle from Alimara?" said Alice with great relief. "Do I know her?"

"Your—your husband does I believe," said Lydia.

"Oh, of course; *I* know!" said Alice, remembrance coming to her. "She was very kind singing to the men in Jack's hospital and getting up entertainments for them; the commissioner's niece. Oh, yes, I remember quite well."

"But you did not know that she was coming to-morrow?" said Lydia.

And again it seemed to Alice that her face looked strange.

"No," she said, surprised. "Why should I?"

"Oh, because the doctor and she—were—were great friends at Alimara," Lydia blurted out. "People—noticed them a good deal—and—and talked about them.

Our cousin—Mrs. Rutherford—told Clara—and she had heard direct—and I—I could n't bear that she should come here—this girl, I mean—without your knowing about it."

At this, not unnaturally, Alice flushed to the roots of her hair.

"I don't know what you mean," she said slowly. "If —if people said anything against Jack out there I had better know it—though, of course, it 's all lies."

"Oh, I don't know what they said," said Lydia with the sudden terror upon her of one who has let loose unknown forces which have at once gone beyond control. "I don't know what they said, except that—oh, they thought they were too friendly—that he showed her too much attention at balls and camping out and so on."

"Go on," said Alice coldly, "there 's more, I 'm sure of it. Now you have begun, you had better tell me everything they said—these old cats."

"They—they said," said Lydia, "that that was the reason that—that she has just broken off her engagement."

"Oh, she has broken off her engagement, has she?" said Alice. "Well, is there any more?"

"No—oh, no," said Lydia. "And," she added with a rush of belated realization, "I feel now that I should n't have told you anything."

"Oh, no, dear," said Alice, laughing a little, though her eyes were cold and grave. "It 's really all right. You know, of course, that I believe nothing—that I never could believe anything—bad—about Jack. Nothing any one can say could make any difference. We know each other too well for that."

She dismissed her visitor, nevertheless, as soon as might be, comforting her with consoling speeches. To any

outsider it might have appeared that Lydia was to be pitied rather than the injured wife.

"What 's the matter?" exclaimed Clara whenever she saw her, just as Alice had done. She might well ask. Lydia had been weeping copiously, and even now could hardly restrain her tears.

"She took it so sp—splendidly," said Lydia as well as she could for another burst of sobs. "Oh, life is a *sad* thing!"

"Well, my dear, there 's no use making it worse than it is," said Clara. "When she took it so very well, she probably did n't feel it much."

As a matter of fact Alice at that moment, sitting meditating upon what Lydia had said, was not feeling it much. One does not feel a mustard poultice much when it is first put on. Alice, twisting her wedding-ring round and round on her finger, was smiling a little at Lydia's perturbation. Poor old Lydia! She was quite upset! And after all it was a trivial matter. Only an old maid like Lydia would make much of it. Of course Jack was very good-looking. He had fascinating eye-brows—so level and so thick. And he was a perfect dear as well. No wonder this girl—for she was just a girl—had been attracted—even to being a little fool about him. She could pardon her for that. Let them speak. Let them say what they liked. Some people, of course, could never bear to see other people having any fun without thinking horrid things. But she knew—no one needed to reassure her on that point—that twenty girls could never take Jack from her. And since she was sure of that—quite sure—it was ridiculous to waste two thoughts upon the subject.

And yet, in spite of her, as she sat on there in the dusk

more than two thoughts came, and more and more added themselves on to them, just as on water troubled at its source little flakes of foam will appear here, there, and everywhere. And the strange thing was that she found they were not all new thoughts. There were some among them which she had had before and which now bubbled up with the others from hidden depths.

Could this, she asked herself, this worry at Alimara —for it must have been a worry to have people gossiping, however silly they might have been—could this which had happened be the cause of the slight difference in Jack, in his expression, in his manner, which she had been trying not to notice ever since he came back from the East? She had been trying to think she was imagining it, the want of the indescribable something that she missed, the absence of mind, the carelessness over trifles, the slackness at times which had taken the place of his old eager delight in his work. Poor Jack! Was it possible that this had been weighing on his mind? That the tattle of these people had been rankling there? That the memory of it had been between them all these weeks —the fear of her hearing of what had happened and being annoyed by it perhaps? Why had he not told her just at once? Then they could have laughed over it together and been done with it. Then she would not have had to be dependent upon poor old Lydia for information. After all, it was horrid to have been told by her, to have a secret understanding with her, however slight, which Jack did not share. It was like a barrier unseen yet very miserable between them, which would have to be surmounted.

And now before this could be done, perhaps—Jack was always so busy now,—this girl was coming, this

girl who was the cause of everything—and Lydia, and Mrs. Rutherford, and who knew how many more, knew all about her and Jack.

This last thought suddenly seemed to weigh her down and to bring with it a heavy sensation of tiredness and dispiritedness. That which had supported her and kept her buoyant and joyous through all the work and worry since Jack came back, through the aggravation with the wretched Gardshore, through the conflict with charwomen, through the consciousness of her own incompetence, seemed all at once to give way a little. Wintergreen's letter with the good news it contained and which she had been so eager to show her visitor, lay on the table now forgotten and neglected.

CHAPTER IV

In which all the Members of a Household get upon Each Other's Nerves

ALICE was still sitting in the dining-room with Wintergreen's letter on the table beside her when the door opened, and, for the first time since the evening of his arrival, Gardshore entered. He was a tall man who might have been any age from thirty to fifty. His thin clean-shaven face was worn and lined. His mouth and chin had the set look of one who has experienced severe suffering. His gray eyes were mournful, his grizzled hair unkempt, and though he was broad-shouldered and strongly made, virtue had evidently gone out of him. The gray tweeds which once had fitted him were now a size too large. He wore no tie. The collar of his shirt —gray also—was hanging open. Altogether, as he came forward into the room and stood gazing at her across the table, he seemed the last straw to Alice.

"Oh, bother!" she said to herself.

But aloud she said briskly:

"Come in, Mr. Gardshore. I am so glad to see you downstairs. I was afraid you were not feeling so well again. Mrs. Dick told me you did not want lunch today."

A faint smile glimmered on the patient's face.

"So she told me too," he said.

"What?" exclaimed Alice, aghast. "She *told* you? How *dared* she? Do you mean to say that she meant you did n't *need* it?"

"So I gathered," he replied. "But please don't speak to her about it," he added hastily. "At least don't do it here. I would so much rather you did n't."

"Very well, I won't," said Alice; "of course not."

But at that moment, as though in answer to some telepathic communication, Mrs. Dick entered. She was chiefly remarkable for a very large plain face and very small bleared eyes. Her dirty blue wrapper with white spots was imperfectly protected by a torn white apron. She entered the room with an aggressive air, and stood with arms akimbo as she delivered herself.

"That 's a message from Mrs. Todd of Todd Hall," she said in a voice which had something offensively triumphant about it. "She 's very surprised that the doctor has not been back since Wednesday, though he said he 'd be next mornin', and she 'll be obliged if he 'll come this evenin' without fail, for that last bottle he gave her has made her ten times worse than she ever was."

This last sentence, needless to say, was an invention of Mrs. Dick's, or rather a revised version of the original message. That had been cast in politer mold. But Alice did not know this. She only recognized that here was another piece of evidence, distinct, public, of Jack's new carelessness. In former days he would as soon have thought of shooting a patient as of making an appointment and forgetting it. The side-thrust as to the effect of his medicine seemed a small thing beside this, but that the whole attack upon him—for to Alice it seemed nothing less than an attack—should have been made in the presence of Mr. Gardshore, was altogether too much.

It made her forget everything for the moment, even her promise to him.

"Put down the message then," she said to Mrs. Dick in a voice that trembled with anger. "You know where the slate is. And don't let me hear of you refusing to take up meals to Mr. Gardshore again. What did you mean by saying to me that he did not want any lunch?"

Mr. Gardshore groaned, and sinking into the nearest chair, put his thin hands over his ears, while Mrs. Dick took two steps forward, her arms more akimbo than ever. With her large face very red and her little eyes very fierce she addressed herself to Mr. Gardshore in a loud bullying voice.

"An' so ye can come down the stair when ye like," she said, "to tell tales and make mischief behind folks's backs? Ye 're able enough for that? Yet ye 'll ring yer bell at three in the afternune an' order yer lunch to be brocht up. I wonder ye 're no' black affrontit. You, a young man, sittin' haund-idle at the top o' the hoose to bring a woman o' my years that never devolves frae workin' nicht nor day, trailin' wi' meals for ye up three pair o' stairs that would tak' the legs aff a horse no to speak o' a human bein'. Oh, ye needna cover up yer ears! I suppose ye think that because ye was at the war a'body 's to serve ye noo for the rest o' yer life on their bendit knees? But I 'll let you ken that ma three nephews an' ma brither-in-law was a' in the war as weel as you, an' what 's mair they was a' killed. Tach! Think shame o' yoursel'!"

As the violence of this storm broke over him Mr. Gardshore only closed his eyes and held his ears more tightly. Alice at first stood helpless with mortification. When she looked at him, however, the aspect of the patient as

he sat hunched up in his chair brought her suddenly to her senses. All Jack's injunctions to her to allow no worry or unpleasantness to come near Gardshore recurred to her in a body and made her faint with apprehension. They also nerved her to counter-attack at once.

"Mrs. Dick," she said when the enemy paused for breath, "you can take notice from this moment!"

Mrs. Dick stood amazed as one before whom a worm has turned.

"I mean it," said Alice grandly, and almost enjoying her own recklessness. "You may stay until to-morrow night, when I have another housekeeper coming. I shall give you a week's wages then in lieu of further notice. Go now and write down your message from Mrs. Todd."

A moment after Mrs. Dick, still breathless with astonishment, had left the room, and Alice was alone with the patient. He still sat with his face hidden.

"Mr. Gardshore," she said anxiously, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

At the touch he looked up. Then, seeing that Mrs. Dick had left, he rose without speaking and made straight for the door. Before Alice had realized what was happening he was half-way up the stairs again.

"Oh, please don't go away," she called after him. "I 'll get lunch—tea—anything for you. Do stay at least till my husband comes back!"

At this appeal the fugitive paused for a moment to lean over the banisters and thank her for her offer. Immediately he had done so, however, he continued his flight and disappeared presently into the upper region he had so lately left.

Only then it was that Alice realized to its full extent

the enormity of her offense. By her fault, she reflected with dismay, Gardshore had probably had a serious relapse. He had come down that day for the first time of his own accord. Now for all she knew he might never do so again. He might refuse to stay. He might insist upon shaking the dust of the Bow House from his feet. By her untimely action she had probably lost Jack this patient upon whom so much depended.

The thought drove her frantic. She hastened upstairs in pursuit. But it was all to no purpose. Gardshore's door was shut and locked, and though she knocked again and again at it there was no answer.

"No, I have had enough," Gardshore was saying to himself.

He had flung himself on his sofa in an access of irritation.

"I 'm actually blubbering," he added after a moment. "Was there ever such an abject wretch as I am?"

But presently he rose and went over to a writing-table which stood in a good light near the window. Then seizing the nearest pen he began to write.

"Dear Professor," he wrote. "You must be wondering why you have had no letter from me. I did mean to keep my promise, but I have put off doing so as long as possible since I could not write without explaining and apologizing and being altogether boring. But now or never it must be done, and as you asked me as a favor, as a contribution perhaps to science, to write a diary for you, I mean, at least, to try. You want to know exactly how I feel here at Cauldstanes, and as there is nothing I would not do for you who have done or tried

to do so much for me, I will do this also. You shall have for what they are worth my thoughts to-night just as they come.

"You want to know, you say, how I am getting on. I am not getting on at all. Does a jelly-fish get on when it has been left stranded on the beach? I have been stranded without hope or prospect in this world or the next. And I detest my beach.

"This old house itself is attractive with a certain gloomy attractiveness. From outside it reminds one of those old houses that Balzac or Dickens describes. But inside, alas! modernity has set its mark on it, and modernity of a mediocre kind. It is over-upholstered. It is smug. There are carpets everywhere. There is linoleum. There are dadoes. There are friezes. I leave you to imagine what they are like. And over all is spread a sickening veneer of artisticness. You know the kind of thing. Pale colors, timid shades, juxtaposed in a way that was once original. Frank hideousness would be refreshing here amid all this washy prettiness. Pardon me this outburst. It is my first, and will be my last.

"There are other things. The clocks are all wrong. There are half a dozen, at least, that strike, and they all strike at different times. This may seem nothing much, but I assure you that at night it simply drives you all but demented. Most of them strike the quarters too, and one does it in chimes like a cathedral bell. Another seems to have gone mad and strikes molto prestissimo agitato.

"During the day, in addition to this, there is an almost continuous sound in some part or another of the house of voices raised in controversy, and between times Mrs. Dick, the charwoman, soliloquizes. There are also at

intervals whispered dialogues on the landing beneath, between my hostess and a confidential friend. Add to all this a strong smell of burning cookery which ascends in waves from the lower part of the house, and even enters at my open window, and you will have some faint notion of what I have endured for your sake. Had it not been for you and for Adair himself, who is a trump in every way and worthy of a better patient, I could not have stuck it out for six days, much less six weeks. Not that I want to run down the little mistress of the place. She is a pretty dear, and means desperately well. Had she not been so anxious to treat me with that cheerfulness I detest we might have got on better. But cheerfulness, professor, since I came here has been the bane of my existence. I assure you that the charwoman, Mrs. Dick, who has just been anathematizing me to my face in no measured terms, is the one who has done me most good. She has galvanized me into being human again, after being for years a case. I have wept with rage and humiliation, and I feel the better for it.

"I realize now, however, that coming here was a mistake. I came because I thought that perhaps after all you might be right, that the trouble which had weighed me down for four years and made me go rejoicing up to every post of danger, was imaginary—a dream, a nightmare that would vanish in an entirely new environment.

"But it is all no use. The trouble is within me and no environment can reach it. On the contrary it reaches the environment. Do not believe the half of what I have said about the Bow House. I see it all distorted, like a futurist or a vorticist. But it reaches farther than the Bow House. It reaches all my old beliefs and plays the very devil with them. There is no God now in my

universe, only a huge Order of Beings as far removed from us as we are from the tiny insects that creep at the roots of the grass we walk on. Every day we see beautiful things, material and immaterial, ruthlessly destroyed. How else can we account for it?

"Do men as a rule consider the lower animals? Why then should those overlords of ours consider us? Exquisite things bloom and die every day where no human eye can see them. The world is not made for us as we were taught to believe. No. We are but a part of it, made to bloom and die with it, and what we call love is only a part of it too. Browning may talk of other heights in other worlds. It was easy for him who had not had to wait for those other heights. My opinion is that if one has missed one's chance here one has missed it for good and all. And I have missed mine, sir, and realized it. That 's what 's the matter with me.

"I ought to have told you this before. You have been very good to me, and it was, to say the least of it, ungrateful not to let you know that I was no case for psychotherapy. But I had not made up my mind then what to do. Now, however, I cannot but let you know. My mainspring was broken. I was incurable when I came to you. Four years ago a girl had become simply everything to me, and she had left me, had never loved me, had been engaged all the time to another man.

"That 's all. There is absolutely nothing else the matter with me. A dozen wounds in the head would not have affected me if she had loved me. Bah. For the certainty that she cared, I would gladly have died in agony. It is the awful blank. Remember she had become everything to me. But it was not her fault. How could she help it? The Powers—those Great Ones who

care nothing—had made her lovely and very lovable. Hundreds of men must have wanted to be engaged to her. I had no business to be angry because she was engaged. I should have railed at the Powers—not at her. But I was mad that night she told me. I spoke like a madman to her. I went like a madman out of her life. She must think of me as one now, if she has not forgotten me. I have never seen or heard a word of her since. But I cannot get over it.

"Nothing matters. I have nothing to work for or to live for on this earth. I am no use for anything; not even as a subject for new cures. It is this last which has quite decided me. Adair is the last consideration which during the past weeks has held me back. He says it 's all my liver, and is trying a course of alteratives on me, and I wanted to give him a chance! But six months ago I had decided to go out, and now I can hesitate no longer. I can't deceive you or Adair any more. I can't allow you to waste any more of your time on me—cheering me up. O Lord, it 's not cheering up I want—it's —oh, I don't know what. I suppose it 's just Jimmy.

"There it is. That 's her name. I thrill to the fingertips as I write it. After all it has been something to have loved, however unhappily. It has been a great, a wonderful experience. All the lovers of history have been one's intimates. The earth itself has been transfigured—revealed. So much for love.

"But now, as I dare say you have already guessed, since I am telling you all this, I have made up my mind to die, and my one fear is that you may think this decision the result of insanity. It is not. It is transcendent sanity. It will do more to help Adair than anything. I am alone in the world and fairly rich. I shall leave a

will which will make him a man of means, and enable him to get once more into the thick of things, where he has longed to be ever since he came back from India. As for the manner of my dying. No one but yourself will ever know that I have brought it about. I can be sure of this. I have seen a man die as I am going to die, and three doctors over his post-mortem agreed that it was from natural causes. A Russian, his friend, told me the real cause and as a favor gave me enough of the powder for my own exit. At that time I thought I would never need it, that I would finish decently. We were before Arras at the time. But the Powers trampled on that too. In spite of everything I lived.

"But this time there will be no mistake. When you get this I shall be dead, not of heart-failure as they will suppose, but of my Russian powder which I shall have taken in coffee. Drinking the concoction which Mrs. Dick calls by that name will be the worst part of the performance. That over, all will be plain sailing. I shall sit down in a chair by the fire, and presently, without effort to myself or annoyance to onlookers, expire.

"It is strange the relief I feel at the near approach of death. I feel more like my old self at this moment than I have done for years. I am gay—flippant—irresponsible. I exult in the thought that though no one in the house knows it, I have virtually done with life. Death is the king of psychotherapeutists. Once he is near, all ills of body and of mind disappear. I, who have not been able to think or arrange anything for many a day, am now thinking clearly, arranging calmly. I know that I must not go until I have made Adair quite certain that I am none the worse for my encounter with his womenfolk this afternoon. Otherwise he would think I had

died because of them and their failure to be cheerful to me. This would not only be misleading to him, but it would be the last humiliation for me. I shall have enough to do in setting my affairs in order to keep me employed for another twenty-four hours. I shall wait therefore till to-morrow night, and in the company of my New Physician revel in all the strange and wonderful sensations with which he has provided me. All the time I shall be saying to myself, 'This is the last time I shall see the moon, the last time I shall see the dawn.' I shall enjoy the night before my death.

"Good-by, dear friend. You would have helped me if any one could.

"Yours very gratefully and affectionately, till to-morrow night, when I shall be no more.

"ARTHUR GARDSHORE."

While this letter was a-writing Alice had been having a bad time. She had spent it mostly on the landing outside Gardshore's closed door. Awful visions of what might be happening behind it had assailed her there in the dusk. Often she had pressed her ear to the keyhole, but the key was in it and no sound came from beyond. At last, however, to her great relief she heard Jack's latchkey in the front door, and a moment later Jack himself, humming a cheerful tune, came into the hall below. At once she ran down the upper flight of steps in order to get within easy speaking distance. As she did so Jack suddenly stopped humming, and looking over the banisters to ascertain the cause of this she saw him standing beside the table in the hall where his letters lay.

He had already torn one open and was reading it. But when he heard her footsteps he looked up.

"Well, dear?" he said, thrusting the letter he had opened into his pocket.

"O Jack!" she said eagerly, though in a subdued voice, "I am so glad you have come in. I—I think Mr. Gardshore 's worse."

"Gardshore worse?" exclaimed Jack, springing up the stairs two steps at a time till he stood beside her on the landing. "How do you know? What do you mean?"

She looked up at him, feeling for the first time since she had known him that he could be rather formidable. His handsome boyish face was grave.

"How do you mean worse, dear?" he said once more.

Then she told him, and as she recounted the details of what had happened in the dining-room his brow darkened.

"Well upon my word, Alice," he said, "I am surprised at you. You know what Mrs. Dick is. Why did you allow such a thing to happen?"

This was the very question Alice had been asking herself for the last hour. The reason, of course, was the visit of Lydia and the resulting perturbation in which all thought had been lost except the one thought. But this, she realized, was no excuse, nor could it be explained to Jack at this moment. With the thought of it, however, the former bitterness returned. She was annoyed with Jack for casting the whole blame upon her. It made her wish to justify herself.

"And why," she said with vehemence, though obliged to speak in a whisper, "did you not go to see Mrs. Todd of Todd Hall? The reason Mrs. Dick came into the dining-room at all when Mr. Gardshore was there was because she had a message to deliver. You had promised to go back next day, and you did n't go, and the medicine

you gave her made her ten times worse, she says, than she ever was."

The manner more than the matter of her speech astonished him. Was this Alice? Kind, encouraging little Alice? What had come to her? But, of course, it was just Gardshore. Poor little Alice! Yet it was rather irritating that she should attack him like this just now.

"Did she really say that?" he said lightly, nevertheless, with the manner of one who soothes and humors an excited child. "Well, I 'll go afterwards to Todd Hall, but now I 'll just run up and see Gardshore. You go down again to the dining-room and wait."

In about a quarter of an hour he joined her.

"Don't worry any more," he said in his former manner. "Gardshore is quite all right. I 'm to bring up his supper when I come in. All he wants in the meantime is to be undisturbed."

"Oh, *I* sha'n't disturb him," said Alice, piqued both at being humored and at Gardshore's message. "He takes care of that. He took no notice when *I* knocked."

"My dear, I don't wonder after what you did," said Jack.

And leaving this to sink in, he went on to Mrs. Todd.

From there he had go on to other places. Till suppertime he did not return, and after supper and his last visit for the night to Gardshore, he went out again. Alice was left once more in the dining-room alone with her cogitations and the uneasy consciousness of the ill-will of her two house companions as well.

However much we dislike and despise people it is always distressing to know of their aversion and contempt. The thought of Gardshore upstairs and Mrs. Dick downstairs became, as the evening went on, more and more

oppressive. Gardshore's feelings, it is true, were only expressed by a grim silence. But Mrs. Dick had begun a farewell demonstration. She had announced at supper-time that she had had no time to make any preparation for that meal because, since she had to leave next day, it behooved her to thorough-clean the kitchen. Alice therefore had had to do what was necessary herself, and if Jack had not been an hour late she would not have managed it. As it was, the results she had obtained had been, to say the least of it, unsatisfactory, and she was virtually certain that Mrs. Dick had found time to tamper with them. Worst of all, Jack had noticed nothing wrong, though he was generally rather particular about his food. His new absence of mind had never been so noticeable. He had seemed to be thinking of other things all the time. Throughout the meal, also, Alice had had the desperate feeling that a barrier of reticence was growing fast between them. When he said good-by before going off again in the motor she almost begged him to take her with him. But realizing that to leave the other two inhabitants of the house alone together was impossible, she restrained herself and said nothing, for which due credit must be given her.

At the same time it seemed to her to be becoming more and more imperative that she and Jack should come to some clear understanding on the subject of Lydia's news. And she sat brooding over the thought that within twenty-four hours this girl of whom Lydia had spoken would actually have arrived at Longshaws.

If Jack would only speak! Did he know of it?

No. That was impossible. He had never kept anything from her.

All the same, as she told herself, gazing into the fire

and seeing the light of other days in it, he had been different ever since he came back from Alimara. Love, far from being blind, is abnormally clear-sighted. She realized now that from the first she had recognized that this Jack who had come back to her from the East was a new Jack. She believed, however, that he himself was not aware of any change or cause of change. He had never kept anything from her. Again she reassured herself. He had never kept anything from her. These people were all liars and fools who said he had. Yet somehow it was just then that she remembered the little incident of that afternoon which she had hardly noticed at the time. Jack had been reading a letter in the hall when she spoke to him about Gardshore, which he had stuffed into his pocket. Why had he done this? Had it been only because he wanted to speak to her? Or had he done it because he was afraid of her seeing it? Now that she thought of it, he had looked for a moment rather strange. She thrust the thought from her, but it returned again and again.

At last, unable to sit there any longer, she turned down the light and went upstairs. Not to rest, however. The strong desire was upon her to find out all that was possible about this woman who was coming into her life, or—dreadful thought—had already come. Yet to no outsider could she go for that knowledge. To no one could she go now except to Jack himself.

Every letter he had ever written to her was in her bureau upstairs.

As soon as she reached her room she unlocked the drawer where they were, and took out the special packet of those from Alimara. Then sitting down at her dressing-table, with no witness to her deeds but her own woe-

begone reflection in the mirror, she began to search for references.

She found in all only about half a dozen. Surely, she reflected, this was strange, though before she had not noticed the omission.

If Jack had been there he could have replied that she had never wanted this information, that she had said indeed that she was tired of hearing about parties and balls and would rather hear about the hospital. But she had forgotten this and the bad temper she had been in when she wrote it. She was unconscious therefore, like many another before and since, that her grievance was a retribution.

On the whole it was perhaps as well that the notices of Miss Carmyle were limited in number. They made up in enthusiasm for lack of words, and conjured up a glowing enough picture in their reader's unwilling mind. Miss Carmyle, it seemed, was absolutely charming. Her hair and eyes were the color of autumn beech-leaves, with the sun shining through them on a frosty morning. She was the best of company, a splendid rider and tennis-player, a ripping dancer. It had been amusing to see her act the part of hostess at her uncle's parties. She had looked such a child beside the stately old commissioner. Yet she had made a topping hostess. Her name was Jemima, but she was always called Jimmy, and the name just suited her. She was engaged to Dawson, the deputy commissioner—a pompous, red-faced chap. The wedding was to be shortly.

Alice had come to no mention of the breaking off of the engagement before she had to thrust the letters into the nearest drawer, and fling a pink dressing-gown around her and let down her hair, and hastily begin brushing it,

because she heard Jack approaching. She had been too absorbed to hear him before, though it had been some time since he had entered the house and had been sitting alone by the dying fire in the dining-room deep in meditations and reflections.

These last were not all pleasant. The memory of Alice's little attack upon him that afternoon had left a certain soreness and sense of aloofness behind it. It had been something new and strange in his experience of her, his loyal comrade hitherto in all his ups and downs. The worry and strain of things in general were to blame for this, he supposed. He was feeling rotten himself that night. Since early morning he had hardly had time to call his soul his own. He had not realized before he went to India how exacting private practice was. In the hospital there, you could relieve each other. You could have some time to yourself between. Here you were never done. You went out to worry; you came in to worry. Even now outside on the slate there was a message waiting for him which would mean being away all night. An urgent message, too. Well, they must just wait. He must have a pipe—one pipe at least—in peace before he set out again. Besides, he must read Jimmy Carmyle's letter. He had had no time before. He had only seen the first line.

He took it out of his pocket, and all at once the sense of strain seemed to relax just as it had always done in the presence of Jimmy herself. The queer delightful feeling of irresponsibility came over him, which had always accompanied her at Alimara. He pictured her in her topi with the green lining, and her clinging white garments, laughing at him in her uncle's veranda, and he

smiled a little as he opened the letter again, setting himself comfortably in his chair as he did so.

Alimara.
May, 1919.

Dear Mister Wu: Was n't that the last name I called you? Many thanks for the p.c. from Port Said, and also for your note from Cauldstanes. I found them here when we came back from camp. Mrs. Crowley had not forwarded them to me—on purpose, I believe.

If you miss me and my fooleries I miss you, too, more than I can say. You were always such a brick to me, even when I was a beast to you, and I am sure you would still be the same now though every one else in Alimara is against me. Yes, they 're all against me because I would n't marry Mr. Dawson after all. I made up my mind finally about it two days before the wedding. It was the very day your letter came. Even uncle is annoyed, though I know from the way he looks at him that he does n't like Dawson much. But he 's terribly good and clever and all that. Even *I* am sorry for him. Well, he 's gone away now, poor devil.

Uncle has had to go too, to Calcutta on business, and I am staying with the Crowleys at present. You may imagine how I am enjoying myself. She and I have always detested each other, and if it were not for Mr. Crowley, who is always delightful to me, I would n't stay another minute. It is roasting hot now, and this is n't half such a nice bungalow as uncle's is, of course. I hate nearly every one in Alimara, and altogether I am fed up.

And what I am writing now to tell you is that I can't bear it here any longer, and that I am starting for Scotland in the wake of this letter. It is so hot here in every sense of the word, and your letter had something so nice and cool about it. It was just like yourself, who were always so nice and cool; the one man in Alimara one could really be friends with. It made me feel your Scotch breezes and hear the sound of your gray sea, and want to start off at once from this impossible Gehenna.

All my relations are down on me too, I suppose; but a trustee of mine, whom I don't know, once gave me a standing invitation to come and visit him and his wife—the Rutherfords of Longshaws—in Eastshire, and I have written to tell them I am coming. I remember your saying that you knew them and that you lived quite near. Oh, I do hope you do still! For you *do* owe me a good time, you know! Remember Alimara and the fun I gave you! I—I—for uncle would n't have bothered much to entertain you if I had n't egged him on, though afterwards, of course, he was delighted with you. Yes, think of the dances I stole

from hundreds of other people far nicer than you to give to you! And the horses I wangled for you! And the concerts I arranged for your hospital! And the jolly people I introduced you to, and the Christmas camps, and all the ripping times we had out shooting, and rise to the occasion when I come.

Do; there's a dear now!

JIMMY.

Jack's face during the reading of this was a study in shades of expression. By the time he came to the end of it the smile with which he had begun it had disappeared.

"By Jove!" he said softly, and then again, "By Jove!"

Then letting his pipe go out he sat gazing at Jimmy's signature as though he were half scared by it.

And indeed he was. The thought of Jimmy actually in Cauldstanes was electrifying. He could not imagine her there. The idea disturbed and moved him strangely. She would be, it seemed to him, so wildly out of place there; she, whose whole life had been all leisure and pleasure. He disliked also the thought of her seeing him at his present work, so different from that which he had been doing when he had known her. General practice at Cauldstanes seemed sordid at the moment, with no dignity or romance behind it. The whole episode of their friendship in India had been so pleasant to look back upon, he would have wished to preserve it intact. Why was she coming now to spoil the memory of it?

The answer to this question raised another point.

Why had she broken off her engagement? She had had no intention of doing so apparently until two days before the wedding—the very day she had received his letter. Then she had done it, had thrown over a wealthy important man, against the whole opinion of Alimara, against the opinion of all her relations, against the desire of her beloved uncle whose lightest wish had hitherto

been law to her. And she had done it, she had expressly said, on the very day she had received his letter.

"Confound it," he said to himself. "What did I say in that letter?"

He lay back in his chair then, with closed eyes, trying to remember what he had written. But for the life of him he could recall nothing relevant to the breaking of engagements. It had been written, he remembered, in the consulting-room one day when the thought of Alimara had been more than usually insistent, one cold gray afternoon when all Cauldstanes looked as though it had just risen from the bottom of the sea, and when by reason of squalid little troubles here, there, and everywhere within its precincts he had come to wish passionately that it could be re-submerged. He had allowed some of this feeling to pass into his letter perhaps. He had given expression to his longing for the East, rather more, perhaps, than he had intended or really felt. He had described Gardshore in his top flat and Mrs. Dick in the kitchen, and had called them the upper and the nether millstones. Yet what in the world could there have been in all this to cause Jimmy to break off her engagement with the unhappy Dawson, unless—— But here Jack sat up suddenly. A new and startling idea had occurred to him.

Surely he was not to blame for this. For a very good-looking man of thirty he was by no means conceited. Yet, like other folks, he had had his experiences, and was perfectly aware that Alice was not the only woman he had attracted. Can he be blamed either for entertaining the idea for five minutes or so, and savoring its mystery and its romance?

At the end of that time, however, with scorn and perhaps a little regret, he rejected it. Jimmy in love with him? Never. She would laugh at the very thought of it. Some day he would tell her of it and they would laugh together. Then, returning to realities, it occurred to him that in the meantime he had better tell Alice that Jimmy was coming, and only then he realized that between Alice's knowledge of Jimmy and his own there was a great gulf fixed.

To him Jimmy meant Alimara and all that it had stood for in his life. She meant the renewal of vivid memories. Alice, on the other hand, had hardly heard of her. He had not had much time to write at Alimara, and since he had come home he had been too much occupied either to think of Jimmy, or to speak of her. Therefore to Alice the announcement of her coming, at this juncture of crisis in the household, would merely suggest calls and difficult parties and painful repayment of hospitalities. Somehow the thought of telling her the news seemed to take the flavor out of it. He feared, not without reason, that, once announced, Jimmy's arrival would become for him too a mere worry, a matter to be argued over and fussed about. Besides, Jimmy had given him so little time. He would never be able to explain anything that night. He had to go out. He was late already. He was tired besides, and Alice was in no mood for it.

This last reason weighed with him more than all the others. One does not give a peevish child something delicate and exquisite and elusive to mishandle perhaps. Jack decided, therefore, to keep his news and his explanations to himself for that night. To-morrow, after poor little distracted Alice had had some sleep, he would tell her everything.

Having come to this decision he ran upstairs two steps at a time to say good night to her. As he went he realized that he felt strangely light-hearted. After all it would be jolly to have Jimmy here. She was such a good sort. She always understood everything, and she would not think them sordid. He had been ridiculous ever to think such a thing. Alice and he had been getting elderly and stodgy lately. Jimmy would do them both good. Already the mere thought of her coming had refreshed him.

He found Alice seated brushing her hair. His eyes full of the joy of life met her melancholy ones glooming at him from the depths of the mirror.

"Just come to say good night, dear," he said cheerfully. "I have to go out again, and may not get back till morning. Have a good sleep and dream of your new cook. I have a presentiment that she's going to be a treasure."

As he spoke he put his arm round her shoulders and parted her thick fair hair with his other hand. Then turning her gloomy face up to his he kissed her tenderly on the lips. There was something lover-like in the caress. The glamour of their recent reunion was still upon him. There was regret in it too for the little rift which was between them. There was the new zest for life also which Jimmy's letter had revived.

Alice felt it all instinctively, and it soothed her secret bitterness.

"Whatever she may have been," she said to herself, "it's me he loves."

And she returned his kiss passionately.

"Good night, dear," she said. "Good night and good luck. Cook or no cook I'll have an extra good breakfast waiting for you."

He went toward the door then, and all would have been well had not some demon of mistrust, emanating perhaps from the darkened window across the street where Clara Fortescue sat wondering what was going forward, entered where she could not penetrate, bringing with it the thought of what Lydia had said. And suddenly it seemed intolerable to Alice that she and Jack should part again with no word of explanation between them.

"Jack," she said, turning toward him when his hand was already on the door-handle, "do you know that Miss Carmyle from Alimara is coming to Longshaws to-morrow?"

Jack paused and turned, flushing to the roots of his hair from sheer annoyance at the failure of his diplomacy. It is always irritating to be forestalled. He was angry also at Alice for the tone in which she had put her question.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I meant to tell you to-morrow morning. Here is the letter I had this afternoon if you want to see it."

These last words were of the nature of a reproach. That neither should see or wish to see the other's letters had always been understood between them. Jack had been glad of this in the afternoon when the letter had arrived from Alimara. But as he stood still with his hand on the handle of the door, and with his eyes fixed on his wife's serious, not to say cross, face, as luck would have it some sentences of the letter came into his mind and unconsciously he smiled slightly.

Unfortunately, from Alice's point of view there was no occasion for him to smile just then, and quite suddenly it made her very angry.

"Oh, I don't want to see the letter," she said coldly. "The coming of Miss Carmyle to Longshaws is of no interest whatever to *me*."

The emphasis on the last word had an irritant effect.

"Then it ought to be," said Jack sharply. "The Carmyles were kindness itself to me."

His tone again roused Alice's ire. It seemed peremptory, dictatorial.

"Oh, I have no doubt she was perfect," she replied, "or at least that you thought her so. Indeed, I have heard as much."

"Alice!" exclaimed Jack, both amazed and indignant. "Will you explain what you are driving at? And as quickly as you can, please. I am late already."

"Oh, I won't take long," said Alice, letting herself go at last. "I only ask you not to get talked about here as you were talked about all over India. Your patients already notice a difference in you since you came back, and I notice it too. That 's all. I have nothing more to say."

She began brushing her hair again with great violence.

"But I have," said Jack, all at once in a white heat, "and that is that if there is a difference in me there is a difference in you too. Before I went away three years ago you would never have thought of saying such a thing to me, or of thinking it of me. Who has been telling you this about me—about me and Miss Carmyle? Who has put such things into your head? I insist upon knowing, Alice."

She went on brushing through sheer bravado, but as she watched his face in the glass her heart beat fast with fear. He had grown suddenly pale with rage. His eyes were fierce though he spoke in a quiet voice. She

hardly knew him thus. She was afraid of him. He was so altered, so changed.

"Who was it?" he demanded again.

"Somebody had written," said Alice faintly. "A Mrs. Crowley to Mrs. Rutherford."

These names fairly let loose the tempest.

"So Mrs. Rutherford came to you?" stormed Jack. "By God, I 'll——"

"No, no! It was n't Mrs. Rutherford!" explained Alice hastily. "She only told the Fortescues—and Lydia——"

"I might have known it," interrupted Jack. "I might have known it was that accursed woman!"

"Jack!" exclaimed Alice, starting to her feet and trembling from head to foot in her excitement, "I can't stand you speaking like this."

"Neither can I stand your Lydia Fortescue," retorted Jack. "I never could. She 's a spying, peering, interfering old hag. That 's what *she* is!"

The truth was that ever since his return he had been suppressing wrath at the immanence of Lydia in the Bow House. He had bitten his lip a hundred times to keep himself from swearing when she had appeared upon the scene. She had always seemed to choose the most inopportune moments. He had gradually come to hate the sight of her both in general and in detail. He had become aware of her influence over Alice, of which both she and Alice were unconscious. He had come to dislike everything she did, her manner of eating and drinking, her way of rising from her seat, her habit of looking timidly in at doors and hoping she was not intruding. He had come to detest even her clothes. Her toques, her fichus, had long been to him in secret what red rags

are to a bull. But Alice had known nothing of this aversion. She was appalled now at its sudden manifestation.

Nevertheless she drew herself up to her full height of five feet three inches.

She cast down her brush, regardless that as she did so she knocked over a puff-box and scattered its contents. Then, with her fair hair all about her, she addressed him with the tragic intensity of a heroine in a third act.

"I cannot allow you to insult my friends even behind their backs," she said hoarsely. "And I consider myself fortunate in the circumstances in which I find myself to have Lydia Fortescue for a friend."

"Have her then!" cried Jack. "For God's sake have her! Only don't expect to have me too, please."

And with these words, uttered with great vigor, he went out, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER V

In which an Account is given of Some Railway Accidents

ALICE stood as he had left her till Jack's footsteps had clattered down the stairs, but when the front door had banged also, she resumed her seat. Then, leaning her elbows on her dressing-table, she stared once more, half dazed, half crazed, at her own reflection in the mirror.

So this was the end. Jack had deserted her, not outwardly, but far more really than if he had gone away to India, or even if he had died. Life could separate worse than death. Some one had said so somewhere. Now she knew that the saying was true. She had experienced the worst. Nothing more terrible than this could ever happen to her. That she should desert Lydia never occurred to her, but she was glad that a whole night had to pass before her next meeting with her friend. Even Lydia, since she had come that afternoon on her mission of warning, had assumed a new character. Formerly it had been Alice who had been sorry for Lydia—poor Lydia, with no Jack belonging to her. Henceforth it would be Lydia who would be sorry for her. She must adjust herself to her new position, before meeting all those people, who now seemed to her excited imagination to be watching her on every side.

In this, of course, she was exaggerating her own importance and the interest she aroused in the community. As yet no one but the Fortescues and the Rutherfords had heard anything but the official news of Jack's doings at Alimara. They had only heard of the splendid work he had done in the hospital there, of his self-sacrifice, of his efficiency. They had heard nothing yet of anything else, least of all of anything discreditable. But to Alice, brooding there and imagining that every one was thinking of her, it was just as bad as if they had been.

She did not weep. She was too stunned, too bewildered, for that. The one distinct thought in her mind was that Jack, openly, before all those people, was about to desert her for this woman who was coming on the morrow. Jack, Jack, the playmate of her childhood, her boy-lover, who had shared all her joys and sorrows since she could remember, who had known all the recesses of her heart as she had known his, until this creature who danced so rippingly, had danced into it and shut its doors against her.

The new grief stirred up an old one. If she had only had a child! If Jack had had a son to come back to, then she would have had a hold over him. But no, no. It was better as it was. How awful to have a hold over him that he might consider only a hindrance! No. The war had changed and ruined everything. It had passed across their life together like one of its own dreadful tanks, crushing in its path all the flowers of happiness that had been budding there. The black despair of youth that sees no future beyond present calamity took possession of her. Everything was ended, it seemed, before it had well begun. All was past. All the love and confidence which had seemed so invincible, so immutable,

so eternal. Jack was already hers no longer. He had received news of the coming of this woman and had kept it to himself. He had left her—his wife—to be informed of it by any one who chose to tell her. He had been bewitched by this beautiful stranger and she—Alice—had no chance against her.

In her misery she stung herself like a wounded scorpion. She denounced herself savagely to her own face. She denounced her hair, her complexion, even her eyes. They were all faded. There were little new lines too about the corners of her mouth.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed aloud, discarding herself.

And she did not stop at her physical defects. She told herself vindictively that she was not only ugly, but useless. She had never been a good manager, but in the former days she had had good servants who had concealed her shortcomings. Now, however, now of all times, everything was dreadfully different. The war had found her out. It had absorbed all the good servants. For weeks and weeks she had been unable to find any. Incapable had succeeded incapable at the Bow House, each leaving a trail of dirt and destruction behind her. And now Mrs. Dick, the embodiment of everything that was hateful and horrible, had been for weeks in residence. Never since she had entered the Bow House had the ordinary comforts of life been at such a low ebb in it. Its food was often barely eatable, its rooms not half cleaned. All the old pleasant dainty little customs of pre-war times were in abeyance. Strife and din, dust and confusion, chaos and revolt, were always present, always having to be concealed from Jack, always threatening to overwhelm her. At the thought of everything

she suddenly burst into wild tears, and had laid her head upon her arms to weep, when all at once the telephone bell rang in the hall downstairs.

A doctor's wife must be ready for action even in the midst of an emotional crisis. Alice half-mechanically rose to the occasion, and dabbing her eyes by the way, betook herself to the post of duty.

The hall light was full on, another symptom of Jack's condition. This time, however, she noticed nothing, but, dabbing her eyes once more, she took up the receiver.

The call was from Edinburgh.

She waited for some time. No presentiment came to her, no forewarning, only the usual fizzings and cracklings and brief questions peculiar to long-distance calls.

Then all at once a high clear voice like a boy's voice said:

"Is that Dr. Adair?"

"No," said Alice. "Dr. Adair has gone out."

"Oh, dash it, what a pity!" said the voice in an audible aside. Then loud again, "Will you tell him," it went on, "that Miss Carmyle was ringing up, and is starting tomorrow from Edinburgh by the afternoon train? Is Mrs. Adair in? Can I speak to her?"

"No," said Alice curtly and rang off forthwith.

Wild ringings ensued. She paid no attention to them, but taking up the appointment-slate she wrote down the message upon it with a firm hand. Then, all her tears dried and her grief transmuted into wrath, she went away upstairs again.

Jack had taken a perverted pleasure in making his exit as noisy as possible, but he had not gone far before he

was regretting it. If he could have spared the time he would have returned and begged Alice's pardon for his behavior. He realized that it had been babyish and very badly timed. Why could he not have kept his temper? After all, it was no wonder that Alice had been disturbed. This misunderstanding—even by old cats—of his friendship with the commissioner's niece had disturbed even himself. As he guided his motor through the night, his eyes on the circle of light on the road in front of him, Jimmy began, in spite of him, to take on a new aspect.

The thought returned which had first occurred to him in front of the fire when he was reading her letter. And again it startled and disconcerted him. Was it possible, he asked himself, that what people said was true? that there was no such thing as friendship possible between man and woman? that sooner or later on one side or the other it was bound to develop into love?

After all, there was no getting past the fact that it was on the day she had received his letter that she had broken off her engagement, also that she had implied that she was coming to Longshaws mainly in order to be near him. Was it possible that Jimmy could actually be in love? Had these other women—these old cats of Alimara—seen more in their experience than he had been able to see?

Suddenly he was conscious of a new and rather uncomfortable feeling of solicitude for Jimmy. Somehow, though she had been engaged to old Dawson, it had never occurred to him to think of her as in love before. She had seemed a sprite, a minx, a tomboy, never a woman. Had she really been a woman all the time? The thought was strangely moving. He glanced up at the stars. There they were, the Pleiades, the Seven Sisters, who

had been wont to look down on them in India, who still—how often had he thought of it since—looked down nightly in vain for them there like Omar Khayyam's moon. Surely they had talked of every subject under them—except love. Was that suspicious? Was that a symptom? . . .

Ah, no—he remembered now,—she *had* spoken of love once! She had put a problem before him and he had answered her. Had she meant more by it at the time than she had seemed to mean?

"What would you do," she had said, "if you were engaged to some one and then found that you liked another better?"

"I would abandon the position," he had said.

"Even if the second never knew of it?" had been the next question.

"Certainly," he had replied. "That would have nothing to do with it."

"Even if the first were devoted to you?" Jimmy had persisted.

"I would do it for that reason more than any other," he had answered.

As he thought over this conversation his mind misgave him. For the space of about two miles he wondered miserably about things, while the motor toiled slowly uphill between high hedges. But as he came out again into the open at the top of the incline, his last memory of Jimmy triumphed, of Jimmy's blowing smoke-rings at him in her uncle's veranda, and giving him the benefit of her philosophy.

"Oh, rot!" he exclaimed aloud to the Seven Sisters. "Jimmy in love with me? Nonsense! She does n't care a damn in that way for anybody. She 's not that sort."

Then his thoughts flew back to Alice like homing birds, and he was filled with remorse for his part in their altercation. How cross they had both been! How cross Alice had been—not because she doubted him, of course not. But because, loyal little soul she had been afraid for his reputation. She had been afraid of Jimmy. For of course she did not know Jimmy. When she did, everything would be all right. Once in the midst of all this absurdity Jimmy would dispel it as the sun dispels mist. All that was necessary was that he should keep his temper in the meantime, and not raise a barrier of mole-hill mountains between him and Alice—the one love of his life.

How lovely she had been standing there in her pink dressing-gown, with her hair all about her, her cheeks scarlet, her eyes shining while she was defending that old hag of hers! How splendid it had been of her to do it, and how like her! He remembered how, long ago, when she was still in pinafores, she had protected an old rag doll from him in the same manner. And at this recollection something deep and fundamental suddenly awoke in the depths of his consciousness, something which no other memories, however vivid they might be, had power to stir.

With this came a new recognition of the fact that no one in all the world could be to him like Alice. But she—poor Alice—had seen a difference in him since he came back. And no wonder. It would have been strange if she had not. The man who had returned to Cauldstanes was very different from the man who three years before had left it. Then he had newly settled down to work, his whole youth and energy and interest devoted to it, his thoughts entirely occupied by the needs of his

practice and the calls it made upon his skill and sympathy.

Now all was changed. The war, like a great magician, had transported him across half the world and had set him down remote from everything with which he had been familiar. He had seen strange places and strange people, had experienced responsibility on a large scale, had watched makers of empire in their work-time and in their play-time, and had for the nonce been one of them himself.

He was glad to get back to the old life once more, but between the former and the latter days there had been a great interlude. And never, with the best will in the world, could he ever again be the same as he had been before it.

While he sat that night watching the issue of a struggle between life and death in a lonely little farm-house on the uplands above Cauldstanes, he realized this for the first time fully and distinctly. He realized also that the war, which had brought him such enlargement, had brought Alice merely imprisonment in a dull sick-room, with none of the excitement of honor and glory attending her work there which it had brought to other women. No wonder she had returned to the old life once more, darkened instead of enlightened by her experience, she who had only had her sick sister-in-law, and fantasies and Fortescues for company. Surely she needed now as much consideration as the unhappy Gardshore. At the beginning of their life together he had been taken from her, and all the love and devotion he could give her now would never quite make up for it. At the thought of this a passionate longing for reconciliation rose within him like a tide and swept away all other thoughts. As soon as possible therefore in the early dawn-

ing he made for home again at top speed, ready, as Mrs. Dick would have put it, to go on his bended knees to Alice.

He shivered a little as he entered the dim Bow House, and remembered that he had been promised an extra good breakfast.

"But it won't be there," he said to himself ruefully. "And indeed I don't desrve it."

Nevertheless he looked into the dining-room to make sure.

The breakfast *was* there! A bright fire was burning. A kettle was steaming. The table was standing ready spread, with cold meat, bread, butter, marmalade.

"Oh, the dear little darling!" he exclaimed, much touched.

The feast, he took it, was a peace-offering, an olive-branch, and presently the dove who had brought it would come stealing down in her pink dressing-gown to make it up with him.

Too impatient to wait even a moment for this dénouement he ran upstairs to let the dove know he had arrived. Poor little fluttering pet! So she had wished to propitiate him, when of course everything had been entirely his fault! Well, no matter now. A moment more and she would be in his arms, her eyes would be looking into his, his lips would be on hers.

But on the threshold of the bedroom he came to an abrupt halt. The cold dawn light was coming in through the window-curtains, but no eager penitent was coming to meet him. As for the pink dressing-gown, it had been discarded and now hung disconsolately over the back of a chair. Hardly had he become aware of these depressing circumstances when a frigid voice from the bed announced:

"Your breakfast is ready, and there is a message from your friend, Miss Carmyle, downstairs."

These words uttered in an indescribably distant manner, the dove turned her face to the wall as though conscious of a duty well discharged, and, almost burying herself in the bed-clothes, composed or seemed to compose herself to slumber.

Jack opened his mouth to speak, but on second thoughts he closed it again. At that moment he could have cursed both Jimmy and Alice in one curse. For an instant longer he stood contemplating the quilt, the crown of fair hair and the long thick plait which still emerged from it. Then —abruptly he turned his back upon them in disgust and went downstairs again.

His irritation increased with every step he took, and the sight of the message from Edinburgh, written fiercely across the slate with a hard black pencil, turned it into anger. All his remorse evaporated, all his passionate longing for reconciliation congealed in that moment like the waters of the Red Sea. Even the sight of the preparations for breakfast now only increased his wrath. Accompanied, as they had been, by a reception implying reproach and suspicion they were an insult of the first degree. If he had not been so hungry, he declared to himself, he would not have tasted a bally mouthful. As it was he soon pushed away his plate, and sat down by the fire to hold a council of war with himself.

He was thankful at least that he had not spoken one word. To have made any remark at all would have been undignified. Alice should know by this time, without his telling her so, that he had nothing to be ashamed of. If she chose to believe otherwise because of senseless idiots, well. so much the worse for her.

At the same time, after long reflection, he came to the conclusion that with Alice in this state of mind it would be well for the sake of all parties to warn Jimmy the Indiscreet of altered conditions and against over-freedom of speech.

But Mrs. Rutherford of Longshaws was the Fortescue's first cousin, and perhaps the worst cat of the lot.

To write a note of welcome, therefore, or to meet Jimmy at Longshaws station, as she evidently expected him to do, would be, perhaps, unwise. The more he thought of it, however, the more he was convinced of the necessity for some preliminary measure. He decided at last, in a kind of desperation, to go that afternoon by motor to meet Jimmy at Brakely Junction, twelve miles up the line, where she would have to change and wait half an hour for a train to take her on to her destination.

. . . . . .

Meantime the two women who, each in her own way, had already caused so much disturbance were both en route for Brakely Junction in different compartments of the same railway carriage.

Jimmy, with her large black hat disposed of for the moment on the rack, and her hair, "the color of autumn beech leaves with the sun shining through them," in the most admired disorder, was looking on appreciatively while an old gentleman opposite, with much puffing and blowing, was strapping things into her traveling rug.

"He could n't do it a bit, you know," she said afterwards, "but he *would* do it, poor dear."

He would have done a good deal more had he not been deterred therefrom by the expression on his wife's face, which, even when it was hidden behind her newspaper, he knew to be unappreciative of Jimmy, to say the

least of it. As it was he had enough to occupy him. One after another, things which had been forgotten were found. Before they arrived he had had to undo the strap of that traveling rug three times.

This being so, it was rather hard that the moment the train drew up at Brakely his charming traveling companion paid him no more attention, the reason for this obviously being the appearance on the platform of an abominably attractive man evidently on the lookout for some one.

"Oh, how splendid!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands, whenever she saw him. Then leaning out of the window—"Jack!" she called, "Jack! Mr. Wu! Here I am!"

In a moment Jack was at the door, and had taken over charge, while Jimmy, with a perfunctory "Thanks so much" had whipped on her hat again and left the carriage.

"Her brother, no doubt," said the ex-assistant wistfully as he watched the two on the platform talking eagerly together.

"Oh, no doubt," said his wife sardonically. "No possible doubt whatever."

The only other passenger who had left the train was Wintergreen, and she had done it without assistance, although she was encumbered by a large hand-bag and a fairly bulky suit-case. She summoned a porter, and gave these things into his charge. Then she began sauntering up the long narrow platform.

In the train which was just starting again two wags took note of her.

"'Ee, look at Queen Victoria!" said the one to the other.

It might, indeed, have been the ghost of that lady loitering there in her middle age. Wintergreen was attired in elastic-sided boots, a very ample frilled skirt, a dolman, and a bonnet which completely concealed all the hair that its wearer possessed except two smooth brown bands, one on each side of her forehead. Her face also at that moment was not unlike her late Majesty's. Anxiety as to the prospects of her enterprise was molding the lines of it into a rather heavy seriousness. It relaxed considerably, however, when at the end of her promenade she turned and came face to face with Jack and Jimmy.

O youth! O beauty! O joy of life!

Jack for the moment was back again in Alimara. Brakely and all the old cats on his horizon had vanished for the moment, and he was in fits of laughter at some trifle Jimmy had been telling him.

The gay exuberance of the couple and their evident delight in each other's society were both disarming and infectious. Some sympathetic twinkle in Wintergreen's eyes as she passed them caught the attention of Jimmy.

"What an old darling!" she said under her breath to her companion. "Do just look at her, Jack. Is n't she perfectly sweet?"

Jack turned and regarded the old darling's broad back as she slowly wended her way along the platform, her frilled skirt trailing a little behind her.

"She does look a jolly old sort," he said perfunctorily.

"I suppose she is one of those dear delightful old Scotswomen one reads about," said Jimmy as they went on again, "who wear the same old clothes for fifty years."

"She looks like it," said Jack.

But the mention of old Scotswomen had had an instantaneously sobering effect. It had reminded him of his special mission, which he had forgotten for the moment in the pleasure of seeing Jimmy again. Now, he reflected, he must really tackle it before this precious half-hour was over.

"Jimmy," he said suddenly, therefore, and apropos of nothing, "I came on purpose here to meet you."

"Why, of course, Jack," said Jimmy with a little laugh, "I know that."

"I came partly for the pleasure of meeting you," he went on doggedly. "But also partly——"

"Partly to tell me that all was over between us," laughed Jimmy; but her laugh was a little bitter. "I knew that when I first saw you. I knew you had taken Dawson's part."

"I have done nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Jack. "I—I was very glad you broke it off with Dawson—if—if you did n't want to marry him. Anything would be better than to be married to the wrong person."

"Oh, I knew you would say that!" exclaimed Jimmy inconsistently, and clasping her hands enthusiastically, "I knew you would!"

"But that 's not what I want to speak about now," said Jack, flushing as he met her eager eyes, for suddenly, in spite of himself, he had experienced a slight return of the uncomfortable doubts of the morning. Was he only imagining it, or was this really not quite the same Jimmy he had left at Alimara? Surely it was a new, rather strange, very much more human Jimmy. The thought made him slightly giddy. He thrust it back, however. "That 's not what I want to speak about," he repeated.

"I wanted to see you, Jimmy, before you arrived—to warn you that here—that here things are a little different."

"How different?" she asked, coming to a standstill at the end of the platform and regarding him attentively and gravely. "How do you mean different, Jack? Just tell me and I 'll know it."

"I 'm going to," he said nervously, "and it 's awfully good of you to help me like this. To begin with—we are to be as great pals as ever—that, of course, is understood."

"Oh, of course," she said; but she said it a little uncertainly, and a moment after he was shocked to see her brown eyes fill with tears.

He had never seen tears in them before.

"Jimmy!" he exclaimed in dismay, "you are never going to cry, are you? If—if this is to hurt you I 'll not tell you anything, and blow the consequences."

"No, no," she said, half laughing again at his vehemence. "See, I am not crying any more. Tell me—anything—everything. Really—I 'd much rather."

"Well then," said Jack, plunging into the midst of things, "Cauldstanes is not Alimara."

At this her whole face changed again as suddenly and incomprehensively as before.

"Oh, Jack, you are delicious," she said, throwing back her head to laugh. "Is that all? Cauldstanes is not Alimara. Well, I should think not. It sounds cooler anyway. It sounds like lovely big waves rushing over sunken rocks."

"Whatever it is, it 's my home," he said, perplexed and a little disconcerted.

"Oh, I know," she said eagerly. "Of course you love it."

"I do," said Jack simply, "but things are very different here. Out in India, though I had lots to do, I did have some time to myself. Here, just now at least, I have virtually none—ever——"

"How awful!" exclaimed Jimmy sympathetically. "You poor dear! And—and even at home you have patients, have n't you? That—that Mr. Gardshore you wrote about——"

The last sentence was so faintly spoken that he did not hear it, his mind being full also at the moment of the first part of the speech. He was hoping—though he knew it meant nothing from Jimmy—that she would not call him "poor dear" in public. The hope, and the fear that it would not be justified, nerved him to go on with his mission.

"At present I have really no time to myself unless I take it from my patients," he continued. "And when I am not actually attending to them I have to be thinking about them, considering their sensibilities, taking care not to offend them. Though I love my work I hate that part of it. Yet it 's got to be done, Jimmy. And that 's where the difference comes in between here and Alimara."

"You poor dear!" said Jimmy again. "But I see quite well what you mean. I quite understand. You have no time to entertain me. You would like to, I know, but you can't. But never mind, you 'll do what you can, and I 'll take the will for the deed."

"Jimmy, you are a real brick," he said heartily. "I knew you would understand."

But he said it with a sinking feeling. She had not understood; not yet. Would she ever understand? If not, what would happen? Well, in any case he must go on now to the end.

"There's just one other thing," he continued. "My wife——"

"Ah, yes—Alice," said Jimmy. "I am longing to know Alice."

"And I am longing for her to know you," he replied, "because—and that's partly what I came here for, Jimmy—an awkward thing, a beastly thing has happened about Alice."

He paused. Jimmy's whole face was one question.

"She's rather run down," Jack went on. "She was overworked while I was away—and small things upset her. She gets easily worried. And that old cat, Mrs. Crowley at Alimara, has chosen this time of all times to write home some trumped up tale about us to Mrs. Rutherford."

"About you?" exclaimed Jimmy. 'About you and Alice?"

"No, no," said Jack, scarlet to the roots of his hair. "About—about—you and me, Jimmy."

"The brute!" exclaimed Jimmy, in a flame of anger. "You don't mean—Oh, the *brute!* I shall never forgive her. And so, of course, Alice hates me—well, no wonder! I'd be the very same if—— Oh, why did I ever consent to stay with the Crowleys? She always disliked me, of course, but now she detests me. You see old Crowley is rather a flirt, poor soul, though he is a good sort, and she is a jealous fiend. It's just like her now to try to spoil everything."

"But we 'll not let her," exclaimed Jack eagerly. "She can't!"

Jimmy's tornado of wrath had completely restored him, not only to himself, but to her. All his uncomfortable doubts and fears about her had been scattered now to the four winds of heaven. This was Jimmy, the old Jimmy again, and no other, his chum, his pal, as he had always known her.

"No, of course she can't," she exclaimed as eagerly as he had done. "You leave it to me, Jack dear. It 's a mercy I 've come. I 'll beat that old devil—you 'll see—I 'll come and see Alice, and everything will be all right."

"I 'm sure it will," said Jack. "I feel already as though it were."

"But, Jimmy," he added, remembering his last injunction, "do be careful with the Rutherfords. He 's another old flirt, and she 's a cat of the first degree, who knows every soul in the neighborhood."

"Leave them to me," said Jimmy.

They had no time for more. Raucous shouts interrupted them from the porter with whom they had left the luggage. It seemed that he had told them three times that the train for Longshaws was in.

Wintergreen, establishing herself in a corner seat, heard him in the corridor outside her compartment animadverting upon passengers who wandered away to the back of beyond when it was past train time.

"A station 's nae place for honeymoonin'," he added.

Mildly interested, Wintergreen watched the delinquents run past her window, Jimmy leading, Jack hard at her heels, and supposed that the former must have found a seat somewhere, for when the train went on

again only Jack was left. His face was flushed and eager and very boyish, with a strange expression on it of regret mingled with relief. She noted it in passing, and pondered for a little upon it, then dismissed it to the limbo of things that are past and done with.

She was alone in her compartment for the first time since the beginning of her journey, and, for the first time also, she was in the mood for reflection. Up till then the anxiety of getting clear away and tackling all the various problems which had confronted her had obscured all other thoughts. But now, with a night and a day between her and the old life, she felt inclined to retrospect. The hour, too, was propitious. Evening was closing down over the woods and the level fields. Those in the distance were already shrouded in mist. Sheep and cattle were moving like ghosts of themselves between the dark dividing hedges. Half-hypnotized, Wintergreen sat watching the telegraph poles, ghostly, too, in the dim light as they passed them one after the other, marking the stages of her progress into a new existence. And as she watched the thought of Mr. Macfarlane came into her mind, of Mr. Carrick, of Dawson and Dalrymple, of the Clackmannans now doubtless taking up residence at the lodge, of the Skellicks itself standing dark and uninhabited.

A fresh realization of her absolute freedom from them all made her want to hug herself with satisfaction. Those people, most of whom had been so troublesome, all seemed already as though they belonged to another world. Here she was free, not only from them all, but from all responsibility whatsoever. She was on her way to seek her fortune like the younger son in a fairy-tale. The thought was wonderfully rejuvenating. It absorbed

her to the exclusion of all else until a voice close by her said—

"Do you know that there has been an accident?"

Turning hastily she found the lady-honeymooner from the station at Brakely, looking, if anything, prettier than ever.

"An accident?" she exclaimed, aghast.

"Yes, nothing less," said Jimmy. "Have you not noticed that we have been standing still for some time?"

"Have we?" exclaimed Wintergreen again.

"Well, you must have been thinking deeply," said Jimmy, laughing, "not to have noticed that. I should think you are the only one in the train who has n't."

Every one else, indeed, seemed to be in the corridor. There was talking and commotion everywhere. Outside and beyond everything there was a panting sound as well, as of some great beast in desperate straits.

"Listen to the engine," said Jimmy. "This kind of accident, they say, only happens once in a blue moon. The driver at the last station put down his brake too quickly and twisted the crank somehow, and now here we are."

There they were, indeed, with dark fields all round them.

"We may be here all night, they say," Jimmy added airily, "if they can't get the engine off the line."

Wintergreen uttered an exclamation of dismay. It is sadly discomposing to be held up in the middle of an adventure.

"You are sorry," said her companion, watching her face appreciatively. "As for me, I am glad. I am in no hurry to arrive anywhere."

"A happy state of mind," said Wintergreen grimly.

"Do you think so?" said Jimmy.

Then, as though obeying a sudden impulse, she came and sat down opposite her new acquaintance, and the two looked at each other for a moment, both interested, both intrigued.

Wintergreen, at the station, had seemed just an old country woman out for the day in garments she had inherited from her grandmother. But this woman opposite her, Jimmy recognized, was something absolutely different. Her speech betrayed her. She was an educated gentlewoman. What in the world was she doing in this guise?

Meantime Jimmy too was being studied.

"Why does she not want to arrive anywhere?" Wintergreen was asking herself. "Was she saying good-by to him?"

"One never knows what may happen next in this world. That 's one comfort," she said aloud.

Jimmy laughed.

"Is it a comfort not to know?" she said.

"At the worst it 's a reprieve," said Wintergreen.

"You are not encouraging," said Jimmy.

"I have always found it safer to expect the worst," said Wintergreen.

"How do you mean safer?" said Jimmy. "Do you mean that you were less often disappointed?"

"No," said Wintergreen, "things always turned out better than I expected."

They laughed together then, feeling as though they had been introduced. And from that moment until the train began to move again, after untold efforts, they talked unceasingly on many subjects. The last was the freedom and comfort with which total strangers like

themselves, who were about to part for ever, could exchange views with one another.

"Because they have no yesterdays together to look back upon, and no to-morrows together to look forward to," said Wintergreen. "They have only a space to stand and talk in for a while——"

"With darkness and the death-hour rounding it," concluded Jimmy.

When they were going again, however, and Jimmy had returned to her belongings and her compartment, she wished that in this instance, at least, she had exchanged names and addresses. She even returned along the corridor before she left the train in order to repair the omission. But she was too late.

CHAPTER VI

In which Wintergreen enters the Land of Promise

THE station of Cauldstanes is the last before Longshaws. Lighted by two dim lamps, and peopled by only two persons, it was by no means an inviting destination. But Wintergreen, glad to see it, descended with great satisfaction upon the platform. Hardly had she done so when a timid voice accosted her.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, but are you Mrs. Wintergreen?" it said.

"Wintergreen is my name," she replied. "I am not married."

"Miss Wintergreen, then?" said the speaker.

"There is no need to call me Miss," replied Wintergreen. "I am Wintergreen, the cook-housekeeper, if that is what you mean."

She spoke brusquely, for she was cold and tired, and her questioner, a dowdy woman in brown, roused involuntary antipathy. She was so obviously being tactful to the new domestic.

"Is this my mistress?" Wintergreen groaned within herself.

But peering more closely at her new acquaintance, as she stood in the light of the lamp giving directions about the luggage, the new arrival's heart smote her.

"This is a good soul," she said to herself. "She means well, poor creature."

And when she turned towards her again she received her with more geniality.

"Have I the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Adair?" she said.

"Oh, no," was the reply, "my name is Fortescue. But Mrs. Adair asked me—that is, she needed—that is, I offered to come and meet you."

"That was very kind of you," said Wintergreen as they left the station together, "and very unnecessary," she added to herself as she picked her way over the cobblestones.

"I am afraid you have had a long wait," she added aloud.

The train had stood in the fields two hours.

"Oh, no, not at all," said Lydia.

"Time is naught in Cauldstanes apparently," said Wintergreen to herself.

A queer thrawn moon was looking down upon the village, and the air was full of the nearness of the sea. A chill breeze met them as they turned into the High Street that flipped up the corners of Wintergreen's dolman. It bore with it the homely odors of wood burning and fish frying. It seemed to be supper-time. Not a soul met them. The street was deserted, though windows here, there, and everywhere were aglow with lamp and firelight. In one—a chemist's—green and red bottles gleamed. In another two nodding heads were silhouetted on a crimson curtain. Otherwise there was no sign of life, and no sound besides that of their own footsteps and of slow waves breaking on a sandy shore somewhere behind the houses. The tout ensemble pleased Wintergreen very well.

"A tranquil spot," she was remarking to her companion, when the lady in brown came to a standstill and said:

"This is the Bow House."

Looking up then Wintergreen became aware of her "place," standing withdrawn from the other houses. It seemed very high and black in the dim light. Only two windows in the top story were illuminated. Over the door was a fanlight, and over the gate a dusty gas lamp, which just sufficed to make legible the name "Dr. Adair" on the plate beneath it.

"I must go now," said Lydia, nervously. "I won't come in. My sister will be waiting supper. Just ring the bell and go on ringing. They sometimes take some time to answer it."

"Good night then, miss," said Wintergreen with a return of brusqueness. She was anxious to get the business of initiation over. The aspect of the place was a little daunting. "Good night, and thanks very much," she added.

With these words she turned her back upon her escort, and opening the iron gate went into the entrance court.

All this Lydia related to her sister five minutes afterwards.

"And do you mean to say," said Clara, "that that was all the woman said?"

"Every word," said Lydia. "She seemed to be rather a difficult kind of person, peculiarly dressed and with a very unsuitable manner for one in her rank of life."

"Well, Lydia," said Clara, "you see to what you expose yourself by your insensate desire to be obliging. A woman like that should have been allowed to find her own way, or at least her own master or mistress should have met her. Her master, indeed, would thus have been better employed than he has been otherwise this afternoon."

Lydia sat down hastily and nervously removed her toque.

"Clara," she said faintly, "you have heard something."

"I have," said Clara. "Our young Adonis over the way was meeting a very pretty girl at Brakely Junction this afternoon. Miss Pennifeather's nephew from just beyond Brakely arrived here to-night in a motor, and he saw them from the road as he was passing. Miss Pennifeather has just left. She did not want to worry her brother about it, though why, being a minister, he should n't be worried I cannot see, but she came round to tell me, for of course she guessed who the pretty girl would be, and thought we ought to know about it."

"Clara, this is terrible!" exclaimed Lydia in great distress. "At Brakely? Oh, surely not. Are you quite sure that it was he?"

"Absolutely," said Clara with great relish. "Miss Pennifeather's nephew recognized the motor first. It was standing on the road. Then he saw the doctor on the middle platform. There was no mistake about it."

"But the girl," persisted Lydia. "Surely, Clara, it was not she. Might the doctor not have been merely meeting a patient—or having a consultation or something?"

"That 's what Miss Pennifeather said," replied Clara, "but all her nephew could say was that if the girl was a patient she did n't look it, and if it was a consultation it was a very jolly one."

"This is awful," said Lydia. "And I 'm sure Alice knows nothing—or—well, perhaps she does. She looks terribly broken down to-day. Oh,—as if she had n't enough already to bear, with Mrs. Dick behaving like a

maniac in the kitchen, and that dreadful Mr. Gardshore, who seems to have taken a vow of silence, sitting up in his room locked in. Since morning, when the doctor saw him, he has answered no knocks, though he has no food —Alice knows—but four stale biscuits and a bottle of water. And the doctor has never been near him again either. He did n't come home for tea."

"Utterly regardless, you see," said Clara. "Bewitched, beglamored. It is a sad business. All the same, it is no reason why we should starve. Ring the bell, Lydia. We are already an hour late."

"But don't you think," said Lydia, irresolutely, as she rose to obey, "that—that I ought to go over?"

"Certainly not," replied Clara. "In this matter, which may end in the courts yet, the less we appear the better. But console yourself with the thought that Alice cannot possibly know anything of this yet, that she will probably be the last in all Cauldstanes to know of it."

Meantime Mrs. Dick, in a state of mind and body better imagined than described, had ushered her successor into the Bow House and had conducted her across the hall into a dim waiting-room.

Wintergreen, as she sat down on the hard horse-hair sofa there, felt that she had arrived at last. But far from that fact having an exhilarating effect upon her she was dismayed to find her heart sinking into her boots. The appearance of her predecessor had been a shock, and the aspect of the apartment in which she now found herself was another. She looked round it with a frown. The plants in the window were in a dying state, even those miracles of endurance, the aspidistras. The clock on the mantelpiece had stopped. The magazines on the table

made her think of patients who had waited there before her for all kinds of dreadful verdicts.

For the first time since she had started upon her adventure she felt indisposed toward it. She wondered what kind of mistress was about to appear. Was Mrs. Adair one of those self-styled ladies impossible to please, impossible to get on with?

Wintergreen, though she was prepared for almost anything, had made her own reservations. To do her work properly, she had decided, she must have a good deal of her own way. She must be allowed responsibility, be treated as a rational human being, not as a chattel without sense or feeling, requiring continual interference and supervision.

But the person who had opened the door was of another kidney. Wintergreen's experienced eyes had taken her measure at a glance. Her appearance at that hour of the evening, tattered, unkempt, down-at-heel, had placed her in her own category at once. She belonged to a species of domestic servant that the lady of the Skellicks would not have permitted to cross her doorstep. And this was the woman she was to succeed? One who had trained her mistress to expect nothing from her, to do things herself if she would have them done decently, to be continually on the defensive. One who had lowered her own status to that of a common swindler who obtained food and lodging and payment under false pretenses, with less will to serve, less kindliness, and less value in a house than a terrier dog.

Could she succeed such a woman she asked herself—occupy the place which she had made for her?

Her spirits had virtually touched bottom when the door opened and Alice entered.

At sight of her, however, they immediately began to rise.

"Thank heaven," she said to herself as they exchanged the first greetings. Then concern for this pretty, sad-looking girl filled her mind to the exclusion of all else. There was that about Alice which made her think of something hurt and innocent, something that needed protection from life, something surprised, amazed at its cruelties, its disappointments, its disillusionments.

But except for the grace which accompanies utter unselfconsciousness, the mistress of the Bow House had little attractiveness that night. She was very tired, not having slept all the night before, and was in the dazed state which comes from prolonged insomnia. The indifference was upon her which belongs to that condition. Nothing at the moment seemed of any importance to her, not even the advent of the new cook-general to which she had looked forward with such eagerness. In vain she had tried to rouse herself to meet the occasion when Mrs. Dick had announced that there was some one to see her in the waiting-room, to remind herself that she must ask questions, make things clear to save trouble afterwards. But it had been a long day of little worries and miseries with the one great grief of Jack's defection beating through everything like the sound of the great waves on the shore beating through all the petty sounds of the village.

She could not remember, she could not think, and she came into the waiting-room absolutely at the end of her tether, hardly able to see because of a blinding headache, hardly able to speak to the visitor. All she became aware of at first was that the applicant seemed to be an old woman, and if anything could have disappointed her then

she would have been disappointed. When it was absolutely essential that youth and strength should come to her aid, here was some one presenting herself who was probably past her best, who would always be ill in some part of her body or another, always more or less off duty.

But as she sat down in a chair opposite to her and saw Wintergreen more clearly, that first impression changed. This woman was not so elderly as she had thought. It was only her clothes that had made her seem so, and those were so quaintly old-fashioned, when she came to look at them, that they startled her into paying some attention to their wearer.

She saw then that the bands of hair on either side of her forehead were brown still without a gray streak; that the face, if a little wrinkled, was hale and hearty as a winter apple; that the teeth were not false, but as white and even as if they were; that the eyes were evidently capable, without artificial aid, of seeing as well and probably better than her own. Other things were even more encouraging: the comfortable outlines of the shoulders beneath the dolman, the upright pose of the sturdy figure, the impression of latent power and capability that she gave, the quiet voice, the unexpectedly cultivated speech. She seemed too satisfactory to be real, but in her abject weariness Alice accepted her without question.

"I am glad you have come," she said. "We need a good servant."

Wintergreen smiled.

"You take me on trust, then?" she said.

"Oh, yes," said Alice. Then she too smiled faintly.

"You *look* good," she added as though in explanation.

"I *am* good, madam," said Wintergreen gravely. "Good at my work, I mean, as good as training can make me.

Though I myself have to say so, I know I can be useful to you, and—God helping me—I will. Do you believe me?"

For a moment they sat looking at each other in silence, and it came to Alice like an inspiration that here was not only a cook but a personality, a power, a god-send. Nevertheless, bitter experience made her answer guarded.

"I *want* to believe you," she said, rising. "Now will you come and see the kitchen?"

Her spirit quailed, nevertheless, as she said it.

How, she wondered, would the kitchen, long exposed to the ravages of Mrs. Dick, appear in the eyes of the new-comer? How would Mrs. Dick herself appear? Since the early morning she had been absorbed in her farewell cleaning operations, accompanied at intervals by loud descriptions of her injured feelings. She had resisted all Alice's endeavors to remove her from the field of her labors before her successor should appear. She had moreover declared that however Alice might have treated her, she at least would do her duty.

When Alice had last seen her at nine in the evening everything in her domain had been more at sixes and sevens than it had ever been, and she had then announced her intention of going on till midnight, working overtime as a reproach to her mistress. Since she had always worked under-time before, this implied accusation seemed singularly unfair to Alice, but, unable to argue with a woman occupied in dusting the bells amid a jangle of hideous noise, she had come away in despair and left her. Now she had not the least idea what the reopening of the kitchen door might let loose. She felt as Daniel's keepers might have done before ushering him into the den of lions.

Sounds as of heavy furniture being pushed about came to her as she stood with her new cook-housekeeper in the hall.

"I 'm afraid you won't find things very—comfortable," she said, hesitating. "You see—you did not give us much notice of your coming, and Mrs. Dick was anxious to leave everything in order—and—and—she has been rather hurried."

Wintergreen was silent for a moment listening to the storm on the other side of the kitchen door, which had now apparently taken the form of an onslaught upon the stove. Oven doors were being banged, pokers and tongs flung about. It amounted to nothing less than a hostile demonstration. But if it was intended to overawe or even deter the new-comer from entering, it had the opposite effect. A warm color rose in Wintergreen's cheeks. A new gleam came into her eyes.

"Have you given her notice, madam?" she said.

"Oh, yes," said Alice. "I could not have stood her another day in any case—whatever happened."

"You cannot stand her now, madam, if you will excuse my saying so," said Wintergreen. "If you will be so good as to trust me so far you will go to bed and let me deal with her."

Alice was so surprised that she did not answer for a moment. The request, made in the most deferential manner, was as startling as the speaker's clothes. Would it be wise, she wondered feebly, to allow this stranger, within half an hour of her arrival, to take command of her situation? Yet to do so, she realized, would mean relief unspeakable. Every moment her headache seemed to be getting worse.

"Oh, I don't think——" she began, to save her dignity.

But then she stopped short, and her silence said more than her speech.

"As you please, madam," said Wintergreen. "But I am accustomed to dealing with such people, and I prefer to do so alone. If you will tell me what there is still to do to-night and then leave me to manage I shall esteem it a very great favor."

The formality of the wording, in contrast to the informality of the demand that one cook-housekeeper should dismiss another, suddenly struck Alice as comical, and she giggled weakly.

"That's right, madam," said Wintergreen encouragingly. "We shall get on."

"Indeed, I hope so," said Alice half hysterically and tacitly consenting to everything at once. "This is the dining-room," she went on, indicating the door of it. "The doctor—my husband—has not come in for supper yet. He may be quite soon or he may not be till midnight. But everything is ready there. Only there will be a kettle to boil and his cocoa to make when he comes in."

"I shall manage that, madam," said Wintergreen dryly. "Is there anything more to do?"

Alice drew her hand across her forehead in the effort to remember, and remembered Mr. Gardshore shut up in his room with his four stale biscuits. But she remembered also that he had already that evening refused supper. To inquire again whether he wanted anything might cause a disagreeable scene, which might make a bad impression upon this new-comer whom she wished to conciliate. On the other hand, if left alone there would more than likely be no sign of him till morning. She decided, therefore, to commit him to the care of Providence, and to say nothing about him that night.

"No," she said, "there is nothing more to do, except that any message must be noted and delivered directly the doctor comes in, and—oh, yes—your room may not be ready, though I gave things out this morning to Mrs. Dick."

Afterward she could not recollect having given any more directions. All that she did remember was the new cook helping her upstairs, preparing the bed for her, drawing the window curtains, and tucking her up gently but firmly before she left her.

What happened immediately afterward in the kitchen will never be really known. All that Wintergreen said of it next morning to her mistress was that she had had no difficulty. Mrs. Dick's report was that the new cook was the impidentest bizzum that she had ever set eyes upon, and that, if she liked to take the trouble, she could quite easy have the law of her.

Certain it is that when the mad clock on the stairs struck twelve molto prestissimo agitato the eviction of Mrs. Dick was an accomplished fact, and the new cook-general was sitting down to a meal a conqueror. Hardly had she swallowed a mouthful, however, before one of the newly cleaned row of bells, which that afternoon had drowned poor Alice's arguments, pealed loudly and suddenly behind her. Unused to being at the kitchen end of the wire she started to her feet in a spasm of alarm, but a moment later she had recovered herself in time to see which bell had made the disturbance. It was still moving, and the name under it was dining-room.

"Dining-room?" she exclaimed to herself. "But there 's no one there."

Then it occurred to her with a shock that the doctor must have come in without her hearing him.

She hastened therefore to answer the summons, but on the threshold of the dining-room she came to an abrupt standstill.

Good heavens! Was this the doctor?

He stood leaning against the mantelpiece, ghastly, cadaverous, with long matted hair and tragic eyes, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his loose jacket, staring straight before him in mournful reverie.

"You rang, sir?" she said.

He started and looked up. Then he stood up straight as though galvanized by surprise. And well he might be. Aladdin polishing his dingy lamp for the first time could not have expected less the apparition of the genie. Instead of the ferocious Mrs. Dick, the futile Alice, whom he had summoned, there stood Wintergreen sturdily in the doorway in her quaint black garments and snowy linen. On her head she now wore an old-fashioned black cap, underneath which the smooth brown hair, parted exactly in the middle of the forehead, framed the plain kindly face with its shrewd gray eyes, its long humorous upper lip.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed like a frightened infant.

It was not the appearance of the stranger that distressed him. It was her appearance at that particular moment, disturbing his calculations, throwing him off his balance, when he had no time or energy left to adapt himself to new conditions. There was resentment in his sudden cry.

"He is on the verge of a nervous crash," said Wintergreen to herself.

Aloud she said:

"I am the new cook-housekeeper, sir."

"The new cook-housekeeper?" he exclaimed. "Has Mrs. Dick left?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then where, in heaven's name, is your mistress?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Adair has gone to bed, sir," she replied.

"To bed?" he ejaculated. "How like her that is! To leave her house in charge of a total stranger! I might have known it—to-night of all nights!"

He stamped his foot in impotent frenzy, and the sudden action recalled Wintergreen to herself, and to many a similar scene of old with the laird her father. It gave her confidence. She had been here before.

"Whatever he does, he is not going to bully his wife," she resolved.

"I may be a total stranger, sir, but I'm not a total fool," she replied aloud. "If there is anything you wish, I am here to get it for you. But it is no part of my duty to stand and listen to aspersions upon my mistress."

Again he stared at her as though transfixed, but this time for a different reason. This was a strange successor indeed to Mrs. Dick. In speech and bearing she might have been a grand-duchess.

"Who are you?" he felt inclined to ask again.

But instead he said with an attempt at calmness:

"Excuse my irritability. I am not well. Can you get some coffee that is not treacle or diluted ink—real coffee—black and scalding—and bring it up to my sitting-room on the top flat?"

"Certainly, sir," said Wintergreen eagerly, and with compunction for her former little attack.

"It was kicking him when he was down," she said to

herself, as she returned to her kitchen. "He is in some great trouble, poor creature, and a sad advertisement for himself."

The supposed doctor meanwhile had returned to his own place and had seated himself at the writing-table in front of a pile of manuscript. Since the day before it had been accumulating. Every hour he had added a few lines or a few sheets, and now the journal which the professor had asked for was all but complete. All that remained to be written now was the last note after he had swallowed the lethal draft. There would be time enough for that before it took effect, and for closing and sealing the stamped and directed envelope. He was sure of that. He knew that.

But as he laid a fresh sheet of paper ready to receive his last words, he experienced no more the same lightness of heart which had been his when he had first definitely made up his mind to "go over the top." Since morning a great awe of what was coming had overshadowed him, and now, with a sudden shock, he realized that his courage had died before him. He found that he was afraid, unexpectedly, desperately afraid. With his hand already on the latch he shrank from opening the door into the unknown. He was paralyzed—caught between the fear of death and the fear of life.

He was still resolved, still determined. The will in which he had left everything to Jack was in his desk all signed and ready. His reason demanded that he should no longer cumber the earth. His fear of life was infinitely greater than his fear of death. Yet he had not before realized what it would be to die in cold blood,

by his own hand, by lifting a cup to his mouth. By that simple ordinary every-day act. It made the whole thing horrible somehow. He longed for some murderer, some executioner to send him forth.

He remembered, however, even in the depths of his distress, that this was not the first time he had known fear. Though no one had suspected it he had been often afraid. He had often had to fight his own cowardice before he fought the enemy. And there were ways. He must do something till that woman brought up the coffee. Surely she was taking an unconscionable time. It was this waiting, this hanging fire that was upsetting him. If he could have taken the powder in water; but no, the directions were explicit. He would disregard them at the risk of failing altogether in his purpose, and failure now would be intolerable.

He took the packet of powder from its little drawer. Then going over to the mantelpiece he stood looking at it for a moment before, with trembling fingers, he laid it in front of the clock.

"Past twelve," he noted as he did so, and then went back to his manuscript to record this. Then it occurred to him that to go on writing might steady his nerves as it had often done before now. He sat down trembling from head to foot, his teeth chattering. But he held on to his pen.

"Past midnight," he wrote. "Everything is now in readiness. I now only await the strong hot black coffee in which the powder is to be taken. A horror of great darkness has come over me which I did not expect, and it is very disconcerting. I try to think it is merely the result of starvation. I have eaten nothing all day. But

I do not close my eyes to the possibility that it may be the shadow of some awful destiny falling upon me from beyond the bourn."

Here he paused for a moment, drawing a long breath.

His self-prescribed remedy had already taken effect. It seemed to him now as he sat there, that another presence was with him, that of the man to whom he was writing. He was no longer solitary. He had an audience, intent upon what he was about to do, keenly interested, expectant, one who regarded him, not as a body on the verge of dissolution, but as a spirit about to take flight, an explorer about to add his contribution to the records of human experience.

Instinctively he responded to the expectation. He dipped his pen in the ink again.

"But no matter," he resumed, "I care not. I go. I fling myself rejoicing over the edge of doom—defying——"

Here he paused again to listen intently. Drops of perspiration began to glisten on his forehead. Some memory of former days, when God had been in his heaven, came to him, and he muttered a few words of prayer. Yes, he had not been mistaken. Footsteps were coming up the staircase.

"Now," he said aloud to himself. "Now be steady."

It seemed to him as he spoke as though he were adjuring some one else, some one struggling fiercely to escape him.

There was a knock at the door, and suddenly he felt deadly sick.

"Come in," he managed to say nevertheless.

When Wintergreen entered he was standing at the mantelpiece with his back turned toward her.

"Put it down on the table," he said in a strange thick voice which he hardly recognized as his own, "and then go away, please. I shall need nothing more."

As he spoke he swayed and caught at the mantelpiece to steady himself. All had become suddenly black before his eyes; the clock, the little white packet of powder, everything had vanished for a moment. Then as they gradually returned to view, a voice which seemed to come from an immense distance said:

"I 'm sorry, sir, there 's no coffee in the house."

Wintergreen had expected an outburst of some kind, but not the silence which followed her announcement and lasted so long that she thought he had not heard her.

"There 's no coffee in the house, sir," she repeated. "I 've searched every cupboard downstairs from top to bottom. And I 've been outside in the street too. But the shops are all shut. You see it 's very late. I 'm very sorry, sir, but I can't get any to-night."

Still he did not speak, and she saw with alarm that he was clinging to the mantelpiece.

"But there are other things, sir," she went on anxiously. He looked so strange—so still—so rigid. "I could get you cocoa, or oxo, or ovaltine——"

Then to her horror he began to laugh, rocking to and fro where he stood.

"Well done the Great Ones!" he exclaimed in a kind of shriek. "Well done! Scored again! Cocoa, oxo, or ovaltine!"

"He 's mad," said Wintergreen to herself.

She came in, nevertheless, and closed the door behind her.

"There 's no use wakening his wife, anyhow," she re-

flected. "Poor soul, she 'll wake soon enough. Poor soul, poor little soul!"

She stood and waited until, as suddenly as it had begun, his wild laughter ceased, and he flung himself down, a heap of misery, in a big armchair which was standing beside the fireplace. Then, wiping his eyes, he looked up and saw her.

"Are you still here?" he said, frowning darkly at her.

There was not only resentment but aversion in his voice this time.

She ignored both.

"Yes, sir," she said. "I waited to see if you would n't let me bring you up something to eat. You 've been working too hard, sir, and I 'm sure you want it."

"Working too hard!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Working too hard! Woman, you don't know what you are talking about."

"Perhaps not, sir," said Wintergreen, "but I do know how to make a supper, and I 'm going downstairs now to toss you up a nice omelet."

With these words, and without waiting for a reply, she left him, and in spite of himself he listened to her going downstairs, pictured her in the kitchen going about her business, pictured, finally, the omelet, and realized that he was ravenous. At the same time, like one who has passed through a great physical crisis, he felt strangely, uncannily at ease and comfortable, conscious of probable agonies to come, but too tired, too exhausted to be anything but indifferent to them. Without retrospection, without speculation, almost without thought, he lay in the great chair with his head flung back and his wild eyes closed, in the abandonment of prostration.

So Wintergreen found him when she returned.

He heard her come in, but, fearing that she would speak to him should he show signs of life, he remained as he was. Through half-closed lids, however, he kept watch languidly as she made her preparations. And, indeed, it was a treat to watch her. She was so deft, so neat. The little meal she set out for him was so daintily perfect. It was in its own way a work of art.

It was a work of magic as well. It conjured up old scenes—prehistoric memories of days when he was recovering from the measles, when there was not even Jimmy in the world. Again he was a small boy watching nursery tea being laid. He felt foolishly happy, idiotically content.

But though he showed no outward sign of consciousness, Wintergreen, by some occult means, must have known that he was aware and awake. She did not even announce to him that his meal was ready, but, softly opening and closing the door, she went away again downstairs.

She was glad to go too. She was very tired. It had been a long day for her. She was thankful it had come to an end.

As she thought of her first impression of Cauldstanes on her arrival she smiled grimly. She remembered having remarked that it was a tranquil spot.

Well, after all, she reflected, tranquillity is not everything, and at fifty a woman could still dispense with it. But for to-day she had had enough excitement. Now that the wretched doctor—how that man had laughed! —was disposed of for the night, she must lose no time in getting to bed. Otherwise how would it be possible for her to wake at five, as wake she should and must?

With this thought in her mind she had just reached the

bottom of the stair when, to her intense astonishment, a latch-key rattled in the front door lock.

"Who in the name of goodness is this next?" she exclaimed to herself. "Do the patients come in with latch-keys?"

Next moment the door opened and some one did come in—calmly too, as though the place belonged to him. Then the light fell on his face, and with amazement she recognized the other honeymooner from the Brakely Junction. She stood for a moment petrified. But remembering her duty as guardian of the premises she then advanced towards the newcomer. As she did so with a firm step he turned and saw her. His handsome face changed visibly at the sight.

"Hullo!" he said faintly, and then relapsed into speechlessness.

But his embarrassment cured hers, except as to what was now her duty with regard to the man upstairs. Could she say he was not at home? He certainly was unfit to see any one—even a visitor.

"Have you come to see the doctor, sir?" she began.

Again his expression changed from something like consternation to something like indignation.

"The doctor?" he exclaimed. "But I 'm the doctor myself!"

"You?" ejaculated Wintergreen before she could stop herself.

This the doctor! This handsome youth! This squire of dames! This honeymooner! So he was already married? . . .

But in a moment she had recovered.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said. "I had no idea. I have just arrived."

Jack too had recovered.

"Yes—from Brakely, did n't you?" he said pleasantly. "I hope you had a comfortable journey. Can I have my supper now?"

"Certainly, sir," she answered.

CHAPTER VII

In which the Land of Promise becomes aware of its New Inmate

WHEN Wintergreen left the room Jack returned to the fireplace and said something rather vehement under his breath. Then lifting an unoffending cigarette-box from the mantelpiece he clapped it down again vindictively. After which, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, he stood gazing into the fire, whistling softly to himself until Wintergreen returned. Even then he made no movement until she spoke.

"Your supper is ready, sir," she said. "Will that be all for to-night?"

He turned then and appeared to regard the table.

"Yes, that 's all," he said. "You may go to bed. Good night."

"Good night, sir," said Wintergreen.

Next moment the door had closed behind her. But not behind the thought of her.

"This is the devil," said Jack to himself.

His appetite for the moment had been effectually taken away by the apparition of the old darling from Brakely. He wished that he could have found it consistent with his dignity to ask her to say nothing of his meeting with her to Alice. But this of course was impossible, not only on account of his dignity, but because of the sus-

picion of the clandestine character of his meeting with Jimmy which such a request would inevitably arouse —if it were not already present.

He tried to place himself in the position of the old darling. What was her name, by the way? He had forgotten, and also had forgotten to ask what it was—another suspicious circumstance probably in the estimation of his judge. That she was judging him now he had no manner of doubt. And how would she be judging him? When he had first seen her she had had the benignant look in her eyes which elderly women accord to exuberant young lovers. He had noted this at the time with some amusement and a little annoyance. Now at the remembrance of it he felt only the latter. Her eyes now seemed very different—cold, critical, gray eyes. Eyes like those of the old women at Alimara. What a confounded fool he had been to go to Brakely. He might have known some old woman would see him, though of course it was a piece of incredible bad luck that it should be this particular old woman. All depended now upon whether she would be too little interested in their former meeting to mention it to her new mistress, before Jimmy had made her acquaintance, and things had righted themselves. Would she mention it or would she not? He wished now that, instead of turning his back upon her when she came in with the supper, he had taken the opportunity of looking at her, of reading perhaps the thoughts that were lurking behind that calm exterior. All he could do now was to remember as well as he could how he had comported himself at Brakely, how he must have appeared there, how he must appear now to her in her new character.

He remembered with uneasiness that he had been tre-

mendously glad to see Jimmy; gladder than he had expected to be, glad and moved at the same time. She had brought back so vividly the memory of the Great Interlude, the romance, the wonder, the color of Alimara. She had seemed to him for the moment to be the embodiment of it all alighting in the midst of the familiar grayness and somberness. He had walked by her side along the platform with the dim fields on either side, feeling as though he were back in the East again amid the glow and the glamour. For some minutes at the beginning he had forgotten that there were such things as spectators, critics, old cats, in the world. Ass, idiot, that he had been! And now this old woman in his kitchen would be thinking things. And on the morrow she would be saying things too, very likely. At all events it would be tempting Providence to act on the assumption that she would not. If his behavior at Brakely had aroused untoward thoughts, either he would have the humiliation of knowing that his cook-housekeeper by her silence shared or thought she shared a secret with him, or he would have the annoyance and misery of having Alice told of the Brakely incident by another than himself.

Troubled by these thoughts he pushed back his chair in disgust, and was sitting down to the fire once more to brood over a cigarette, when he suddenly remembered that since lunch-time that day he had never been near his patient on the top flat. At that time Gardshore had refused both lunch and company. His door had been locked, and he had politely but firmly refused to see him. That was, he reflected with self-reproach, more than twelve hours ago, and since then he had had no report. He must go up at once.

Alice, it seemed, had gone to bed. He had not ex-

pected to see her and had not asked for her. Her annoyance with him was quite enough to account for her leaving his supper in charge of the new cook. Had she not already that day left him to breakfast alone? He had a slight access of bitterness as he passed her closed door on his way upstairs, and this mood engendered another before he reached the top landing. The new mood was one of indignation at himself for allowing gossip to influence him so far as to make him afraid of his own cook-housekeeper. Nay more—so far as to have made him think of meeting Jimmy at Brakely instead of at Longshaws. As he mounted the stairs, guided by the streak of light under Gardshore's door ahead of him, he realized for the first time that in pandering to busybodies he had taken one of those false steps apparently unimportant but very difficult to retrace, and that he had taken it because even he had been misled, even he had been brought to think strange things of Jimmy's friendship. He had been disloyal to her in thought, and this dilemma now served him right.

The one thing he could do now was to be perfectly open about the whole Brakely affair, to take it as a matter of course that he should have wished to meet and render assistance to the traveler on her way, to her who had assisted him, chaperoned him, instructed him when he had been a stranger in a strange land. Why should he not? He was sorry now that, instead of seeing her into the train merely, he had not motored her from Brakely to Longshaws, and delivered her in style to Mrs. Rutherford. Then his position would at once have been made plain. He cursed himself once more for his stupidity. At the same time he knocked on Gardshore's door. Well anyhow, he resolved, there should be no more conceal-

ment, no shadow of clandestine understanding about his relations with Jimmy now. Not only Alice but every one who came along should know everything if they cared to know. Anything would be better than sharing secrets with the new servant.

As he knocked at Gardshore's door he decided to begin with him. He would have to make an excuse for his lateness anyhow.

"Come in," said Gardshore.

"Good evening," said Jack, entering. "Or rather good morning. Are you not going to bed to-night?"

"No," said Gardshore from the depths of his big chair. "At least I don't think so."

"I hope you have n't been waiting up for me," said Jack. "I am sorry I am so late, but I was meeting a friend at Brakely Junction, a Miss Carmyle who has just arrived from India, and is on her way to stay with the Rutherfords at Longshaws."

There was a moment's silence at the close of this speech. Then Gardshore's voice came hoarsely from the depths of his big chair.

"What name did you say?" he asked.

"Miss Carmyle," said Jack. "She was the niece of the commissioner at Alimara where I was. And," he continued, warming to his subject and urged on by the relief of being perfectly open at last, "she was a delightful person. We all called her Jimmy and the name just suited her. She was guide, philosopher, and friend to me, and it was mainly through her that, out of work-hours, I had the splendid time I had there. She showed me India both outside and inside. You 've no idea what a boon she was. And when I heard that she was coming to stay in our neighborhood, naturally——"

"Oh, naturally," said Gardshore.

He had not moved, but there was something in the tone of his voice that Jack did not quite like. He reviled himself again for his oversensitiveness, but there it was.

"Is her uncle with her?" said Gardshore next.

"No," said Jack. "The fact is, her uncle is rather annoyed with her at present. She had been engaged for some time to be married to a man, Dawson, high up in the civil service—a deputy commissioner in fact—and two days before the wedding she threw him over."

"Oh, really?" said Gardshore. "I wonder why she did that?"

Again the tone of voice was almost offensive.

Decidedly Gardshore was in a difficult mood. The only thing to do now, however, seemed to be to go on. Otherwise, who knew but that Gardshore also—— Jack was sorry now he had begun with him, morbid, brooding invalid as he was. It had been another false step evidently. Was he never to be done with false steps?

"Who can tell?" he said nevertheless as casually as he could. "But I gathered from her letter——"

"Ah, so you corresponded?" said Gardshore softly, and again in that beastly tone.

"We have exchanged I think one letter and one post-card," said Jack, flushing in spite of himself.

He was angry now. After all what business was it of Gardshore's if Jimmy and he *did* correspond?

"Oh, indeed; a letter and a post-card?" said Gardshore. "And what reason did she give you for her change of mind?"

"None except that she had never cared for Dawson," said Jack. "But after all, of course, that's nobody's

business. All the same everybody in Alimara is down on her for doing it."

"Really?" said Gardshore again.

"And so she decided to leave them all," said Jack.

"And come to Cauldstanes—ah, no—the Rutherfords of course," said Gardshore. "Very interesting. And so you met her? But why Brakely? It 's a long way off, is n't it? Why not Longshaws?"

"It suited better," said Jack, flushing again in spite of himself. "But I should n't have bored you with all this to-night, only I wanted to explain——"

"Thank you; I quite understand," said Gardshore cryptically.

After that he became so monosyllabic that Jack felt constrained to leave him.

"Confound him," he said as he went down to the floor beneath.

His first experiment in expansiveness had not been encouraging. It had disinclined him for further experiments that night. Besides, he was dead beat. He made up his mind to snatch some repose at least before his next effort.

But this was not to be. Hardly had he entered the bedroom and struck a match when Alice sat up in her bed. Since morning her mood had changed. The long dreary day of alienation, the first in all their life together, had brought her to the pass of forgiving and forgetting everything, or, if not exactly that, of at least pretending that she had forgiven and forgotten. She had had a sound sleep when Jack came in and woke her, and was in a saner state of mind than she had been in for two days. It had probably been her own fault, she reflected, that Jack had not told her about Miss Car-

myle of his own accord. She had been terribly cross, and he had very likely been silent in order to spare her further worry over the entertainment of this stranger. She always made such a fuss. Poor old Jack! She had been a little fool and had deserved to be miserable. After all, what cause had he ever given her to distrust him? He had been quite right too not to justify himself. Her suspicion had been an insult. Oh, what a fool she had been! In the first flush of her repentance she had all but sprung out of bed and run downstairs to say all this to him when she heard him come up and pass the door of her room on his way up to Gardshore's.

"He is in no hurry to-night," she reflected with self-reproach as she remembered how, as a rule, he ran upstairs two steps at a time to her.

The murmur of voices in the room above seemed as though it would never cease, but at last she heard Jack once more descending. A moment later he entered the room, and the match he had struck was illuminating his tired, rather sulky face.

"Oh, Jack," she exclaimed eagerly and holding out her arms to him, "I 'm so sorry I vexed you this morning. I was a little b—beast to you. Can you ever forgive me?"

It was a question which, because of its significance and because of the manner in which it was put, should have been answered instantaneously, with enthusiasm, with abandonment. It was unfortunate, dramatically speaking, that Jack, having the lighted match already in his hand, had to light the gas first. He wished vaguely as he did so that Alice had not begun her little outburst before he had accomplished this. But this was not the worst. He wished at that moment that she had not be-

gun at all, but had remained, as she had done that morning, with her face turned to the wall. He was tired. He was stupid. He was in no mood for another crisis. And now, of course, here was another confronting him. In order not to obtain reconciliation under false pretenses it would be necessary for him to tell Alice about Jimmy now, and not to wait until to-morrow as he had intended.

"Oh, damn it!" he muttered to the gas.

But there was nothing for it. There was Alice with tears in her eyes and her arms outstretched towards him.

"Forgive you?" he exclaimed aloud with what eagerness he could muster. "You know I can, darling."

But his tone sounded unconvincing even to himself. He came and sat down, however, on the edge of the bed, and she threw herself on his breast.

"It must be now or never," he said to himself even as he returned her caresses. But she gave him no time.

"O Jack," she exclaimed, nestling her head against his shoulder, "I have been so miserable all day without you. It seemed worse than when you were away in India. O Jack, if we were really estranged I could not bear it. Could you?"

She sobbed passionately at the mere thought. What could he do but comfort her?

"I 'll tell her in a minute though," he said to himself. "I must."

But still she gave him no chance. To begin about Jimmy now in the midst of this emotion seemed impossible. He felt that he must wait.

"It could never be, could it, Jack?" she urged, clinging more closely to him. "You are not angry with me now, are you? Nothing could ever separate us. No one could—could they?"

Now at least he could answer freely.

"No, no, darling; of course not," he murmured, with responding passion.

And then, having for the moment passed the point beyond which words are unnecessary, he sat holding her in silence, his lips pressed to hers.

And surely then all would have been well, he would have told her everything, talked everything out with her, made her understand, had not at that moment of moments the telephone bell cut across the silence. It seemed to Alice like the voice of some mocking fiend breaking in now upon her joy as it had broken in the night before upon her misery.

"O Jack—don't—please don't go," she implored him.

"My dear, I must," he said as the bell rang again urgently, vociferously, making all the night hideous. "I must, but it may be nothing."

He hurried from the room.

It was not "nothing." It was death, imminent, perhaps immediate, miles away over rough roads. Even now with all the haste he could make he might not be in time.

Alice, listening upstairs, heard him dash into the consulting-room, dash out again, bang the front door, and then make for the garage behind the house. A few moments later the motor grunted out into the street, and then, gaining speed as it went, whirred away into the distance.

Meanwhile Jack, besides being the sport of circumstance, was being made also the subject of analysis. A few minutes after he left his room Gardshore had left his big chair with wonderful agility considering his for-

mer limp state and had seated himself once more at his writing-desk. There he wrote furiously for some minutes describing the scene between himself and Jack, relating all that Jack had said and what he had said in answer.

Then more slowly he began to comment upon it.

"He evidently has no idea what this means himself," he wrote. "For a really handsome youth he seems to be singular unconversant with the ways of women. And she is so clever—*la belle dame sans merci*—that she could take in the devil. The point for me now, however, is that she is about to make a fool of my good Adair, if she has not already done so. I am certain of this, and the certainty—strange to say—has for the moment cured me. For the first time since it happened I rejoice now that my plan was thwarted, that I am still in the land of the living to stand between my lady and her intention, that to all intents and purposes I have the power still of leaving my lake where the withered reeds are, and no birds sing, to protect the new knight-at-arms, about to be entangled, I see, in the toils of the enchantress; to protect not only himself but his pretty silly little wife who directly and indirectly has made me so very uncomfortable; to heap coals of fire upon my hostess's head, and keep, if I can, her husband for her.

"Well done destiny again—or whatever angels or fiends may have been concerned. After all, they must have had some concern, some foresight in the matter. But for their intervention to prevent Mrs. Adair and Mrs. Dick having the sense to provide the house with coffee I should have been dead and useless.

"Now instead of dying I can go to sleep with a future—insignificant perhaps, but yet a distinct future

once more before me on this earth, my business being to do some thwarting myself instead of being for ever thwarted. And in the doing of it I may see Jimmy. Yes, I need not deny it to you, professor, there is new life in the thought. Even after all that has happened! I could not have believed it of myself. Abject fool! Yet I cannot help it. Even to write her name is exhilarating. Jimmy Carmyle. And she is still Jimmy Carmyle. Strange—how I rejoice at that.

"Witch! So you are coming into my life again, stepping into it unawares on your way to pastures new, in your old light-hearted, cruel fashion—crossing it, treading upon it as you would tread upon a flower you had once worn.

"But now I meet you with a great ally at my back. Death who has made everything different, everything possible, stands awaiting my pleasure. We shall see, Jimmy, who is to win this time—you or I. Au revoir, Jimmy Carmyle!"

He read this over, stared at it for a few moments, then seizing the manuscript—"Sentimental tosh!" he ejaculated, and, tearing it across and across, he flung it into the wastepaper-basket.

After that for a long time he stood at the window, gazing at the sinking moon, and listening to the waves, now far distant, for the tide was out.

Then he went to bed.

Half an hour before this Wintergreen had retired up the narrow stair at the other end of the house to her attic-bedroom. From its high dormer-window she could have seen the moon too. But she did not so much as glance at it.

"If I don't go to bed," she reminded herself, "I shall never be able to get up."

If she thought she would go to sleep, however, when she got into bed she must have been disappointed.

In vain she drew the bed-clothes over her ears to shut out the sound of the waves. In vain she tried to think of fields of waving corn, or sheep, one by one, coming through turnstiles. The thought of her unhappy young mistress, and of the radiant squire of dames honeymooning with another woman gave her no peace. In vain she tried to put the whole thing behind her, to assure herself that it was all no business of hers. She could not help thinking that, unexpected as it was, it was undoubtedly her business.

"And the sooner you get used to that thought the better," she admonished herself.

It was as though a traveler who had only known a country by the map of it had found himself in the midst of it surrounded by grass ten feet high and infested by the larger quadrupeds. It was no wonder that the adventuress who had selected a field of action which she had supposed to be free from the major responsibilities was disconcerted to find, now that she was actually there, that it was nothing of the sort.

She felt that some adjustment of her mental attitude was still necessary though it had been changing of itself ever since the first appearance of Alice. There had been something in her which had aroused the new cook's protectiveness, and Wintergreen's sympathy, though it was half contemptuous, was very genuine. It had given power to her tongue when she was dealing with Mrs. Dick and had added irresistible force to her address of dismissal. The tenderness with which she had tucked

her mistress into bed had been transformed in the presence of her persecutor into cold ferocity.

As she now lay thinking, however, she almost envied Mrs. Dick her obtuseness, her indifference, her escape from the coil of other people's circumstances. The problem which she had already tackled, she realized, might be as nothing to the problem of the beautiful young stranger. She could not be ordered off like Mrs. Dick. For one thing she was not there to be ordered. Nor was she likely to be, Wintergreen reflected, thinking of books she had read about unhappy love-affairs. One of the parties always went away. And naturally in this case it would be the odd woman who would have to go. That she had to do with an unhappy love-affair Wintergreen had no manner of doubt. Had the girl not as much as said so? No young woman in her seven senses otherwise would not want to arrive anywhere. And how beautiful she was! Might not even the memory of her be a danger in the household? The more Wintergreen thought of the fascinating intruder, and compared her with Alice as she had been that evening, the more the protective instinct arose within her. But along with it came another thought which complicated it. Her sympathy seemed to be strangely divided between Alice and the intruder. She was bound, of course, to protect Alice, but wild things appeal always to plain sensible women. And there had been something about Jimmy in the railway-carriage, something sad and yet devil-may-care, which appealed to her very strongly. She would never be able to forget her. But what about her young master?

When she had seen him at the station she had known nothing of the existence of Alice. Now in the light of

discovery she saw more in the meeting with the beautiful young stranger than had at first appeared, more even, she realized, than might have appeared to the man himself.

He had been very happy there at the station, very glad, very eager. His welcome had been very genuine. The intruder had been very lovely in her evident pleasure at meeting him. And that wife of his upstairs——

At this point she suddenly fell asleep, to dream that she was walking down an interminable platform with a train starting at the far end of it, and a strong breeze against her.

It seemed hardly five minutes before the whirring of the alarm-clock, which she had placed on a table within two feet of her left ear, announced to her that it was five in the morning.

"If you think about it you 'll never get up," she admonished herself.

She did not think about it therefore, and she did get up. As a consequence, by the time it came to her predecessor's usual rising-time, she had done a considerable stroke of work. The brasses outside had been polished till they shone like fine gold, the lamp over the gateway had been washed and burnished, the door-step had been changed from the semblance of a tombstone moldering in a churchyard to a patch of snowy whiteness. The dining-room also had been swept and dusted. A fire crackled on the hearth. The breakfast-table was set, kettles were boiling. Eggs were ready to poach whenever the powers above should give the word.

But while Wintergreen, in her morning wrapper and a dust-colored head-dress which permitted no hair at all to appear, was seated at her own breakfast in the kitchen,

her name and fame were already passing from mouth to mouth through Cauldstanes.

Some fishermen had been the first to hear of them when they returned with the morning tide and found their wives all full of the great news that Jane Dick—Roarin' Jane, as she was called in the village—had been expelled from the Bow House in the middle of the night. She had returned to her own house in a towering rage only to find it locked up, and her husband, who was a railway-man, out on a night shift. She had had to obtain the key, therefore, from the house next door, and in doing so had awakened the neighborhood with the declamation of her grievances. Some were rejoiced at her discomfiture, some were sympathetic, but all agreed that the new cook-housekeeper, Wintergreen, must be a mettle woman. No one before, not excluding her own husband, had ever been known to counter Jane successfully. She had always carried all before her. Her downfall before a stranger was nothing less than sensational.

When Wintergreen about six o'clock was observed to have started her morning's work, many an eye was directed to the Bow House, many a tongue wagged about her.

At half-past six a broad, stout, smooth-faced man of forty, in corduroys and leggings and shirt-sleeves and smoking a cutty pipe, came along from the far end of the street in a leisurely and reflective manner. It was Alexander Dunn, the chauffeur, whose duty for weeks past it had been to awaken Mrs. Dick.

But this morning he was hailed by a little crowd of women who had gathered at the door of Mrs. McAllister the grocer's shop almost opposite the Bow House.

"Hey, Alexander!" said Mrs. McAllister herself, a

burly woman with a cod face who was the center of the group. "Ye 're no' needit the day. Roarin' Jane 's no' there. She 's awa'. She was pit oot last nicht.'

Alexander, though he was a driver of skill and could manœuver a motor as quickly as any man, was, in the adjustment of his own brain-mechanism to new developments, always rather deliberate. He came to a standstill on this occasion, and taking his pipe from his mouth, regarded his interlocutor without speaking.

"He disna believe ye, Mistress McAllister," said a voice.

"Aweel, believe 't or no, it 's the case," said Mrs. McAllister.

"Wha pit her oot?" said Alexander.

"The new cook," said a dozen voices.

"The new what?" said Alexander, unable to believe his ears.

And then the chorus burst out.

"The new cook—an' her name 's Wintergreen."

"But she 's no' that green neither. She 's up to a thing or twa!"

"She 's up to Jane Dick onyway."

"My! Jane was in a bonny rage!"

"Ye could ha' heard her doon at the end o' the long pier."

"The Lord help her man when he comes hame frae the nicht shift. Little does he ken what 's awaitin' him."

"Ay—puir Dave——"

Here Alexander's big, fat, rather hoarse voice boomed in like a trombone silencing the shrill clamor.

"An' d' ye mean to tell me," he said, "that since I was there last nicht a new cook 's come to the Bow House that was able to pit oot Jane Dick?"

There was a chorus of assent and the clamor recommenced.

But Alexander held up his hand for silence.

"That 's a' I want to ken," he said crushingly, and replacing his pipe in his mouth he went on his way.

They were most of them still there, however, though some time had elapsed when he reappeared with a slightly self-conscious air. To their great surprise he came straight toward them. The crowd parted to let him pass and then closed in behind, while McAllister, seeing that he came now in the character of a customer, hastily took her place behind the counter.

"Ha' ye ony coffee-beans?" he said.

"Coffee what?" said Mrs. McAllister.

"Coffee-beans, woman," said Alexander. "Ha' ye never heard o' coffee-beans?"

"I 'd heard o' them afore you were born," retorted Mrs. McAllister, "but I never keep them. I 've never had nae troke wi' the beans. Plain coffee 's aye done for me an' my customers."

"An' you pretendin' to keep a grocer's shope!" exclaimed Alexander. "An' no' a coffee-bean in the place. I wonder ye dinna think shame."

"Alexander Dunn!" retorted Mrs. McAllister in high dudgeon, "I'll thank ye to let me keep my shope mysel'! Naebody askit ye to come inside it, an' naebody 'll be sorry when ye gang oot o' 't."

At this crisis another voice intervened.

It was Kate Dow from the manse, who on account of long service had a totally undeserved reputation for being a household treasure. She had been out for the milk and, as she had always done in spite of all protests, had lingered by the way.

"I ken what ye mean," she said to Alexander. "Mr. Pennifeather aye has them. He gets them frae Dundee. He roasts them and grinds them up in a wee machine, an' drinks them in het watter to keep him frae sleepin' at his sermons."

"He would be better to gi'e them to his congregation," said another voice.

But no one listened, for Alexander was again speaking.

"Aweel, Kate," he said. "Ye 'll ha' to gi'e me a len' o' a pickle the day till we get some frae some ither place whaur they understand aboot groceries."

"Come on then!" said Kate. "I kenn whaur they 're keepit!"

"Richt!" said Alexander. "I 'm no' gaun back withoot them."

The two moved off then in the direction of the manse, and instantly the chorus broke forth again.

"Heard ever onybody the like o' that?"

"An' him that would never dae a haund's turn to help Jane!"

"An' noo to please this—what-ye-may-call-her—he would rifle the very manse."

"Ay, she 's fairly got to the north o' Alexander."

"She maun be an awfie woman."

"Ye 'll ha' to get in some coffee-beans, Mistress McAllister, an' look slippy aboot it, afore she tak's her custom ither-where."

"No' me," said Mrs. McAllister contemptuously. "I 've mair to dae than to get in sic trash! I wouldna file my coonter wi' them! Her an' her coffee-beans!"

CHAPTER VIII

Which begins within a Sick-room and ends among Sea-pinks

IT is strange how tangled are the threads of existence, so that the lives of strangers react upon each other, and the fate of one whose very name is unknown to them becomes of infinite importance to that of others. If Jack's patient had died before he reached him, as Jack expected he would, or if he had been less near dying that night, much that happened afterward would never have happened. As it was, the patient, being a man as his wife said who never did nothing like other people, remained on the edge of death, so near that from time to time he hovered over it, but morning found him still living, still on the hither side. It found Jack too still watching by his bed, or nominally so, for he had been asleep for about an hour. About five, however, he woke with a start, found his patient much better, and decided to depart. This he was the more anxious to do because of the interruption of the night before. Now he must lose no time in telling Alice of Jimmy's arrival. In her new mood she would be able to receive the news as it ought to be received, and they could arrange at the same time to call together at Longshaws. With his mind full of this scheme he went down the stairs of the little farm-house where he had been all night and gave the mistress his good news, adding that now the patient was out of danger

for the present he would take his leave. But this was more easily said than done.

"Eh, no, doctor!" exclaimed the patient's wife as loudly as circumstances permitted. "Yer breakfast 's jist gettin' ready. Ye 'll never gang noo withoot it. An' I was jist wonderin'. Ye see my eldest dochter 's no' gettin' on wi' her man, an' noo that her feyther 's laid up an' no' to be worried, what ye would advise aboot it, doctor?"

"Am I a lawyer that I should be asked to do this thing," said poor Jack to himself. But the smell of bacon frying was alluring. His client too was a good soul and one of his stanchest friends. Nearly another hour passed therefore before he left for home.

Clear cold sunlight was struggling through a veil of mist lighting up the fields in patches and touching the distant calm gray sea. All was still save for birds twittering in the hedges and here and there in farm steadings cocks crowing in the day. The motor moving almost noiselessly did not disturb the silence. Everything seemed dreamlike to Jack and he himself part of the dream. It was a pleasant dream too. He was proud of his night's work. Grateful words of appreciation and thanks still rang agreeably in his ears. He was glad also to think of Alice's change of attitude. Things yesterday had been very miserable. Now they would be different. With his mind full of these thoughts he turned from the farm road into the highroad, which leads past Longshaws to Cauldstanes. From this point he could look down on the latter, a huddle of gray and red roofs so near to the edge of the sea that they seemed as though they had been left there by the tide. He could distinguish the Bow House dark and solid in the midst of them, and the

thought of Alice there awake perhaps and waiting for him was absorbing him to the exclusion of all else, when he was hailed by a well-known voice and, to his astonishment, almost to his dismay, he beheld Jimmy on the road in front of him.

She had just emerged from the gates of Longshaws. A great mass of vivid green foliage was behind her. She wore no hat. Her hair glowed in the sunshine. She seemed the embodiment of youth and summer.

"Oh, how perfectly ripping!" she exclaimed as he pulled up beside her. "I could n't sleep a wink last night, and after five I could n't stand it any longer. So I 've just come in the nick of time. Are you going home now? Will you take me with you? I could see Alice for a minute and easily be back for breakfast."

"Oh, that 's awfully good of you," said Jack. Then he hesitated and was lost. "But I 'm afraid," he went on, "that Alice won't be up yet."

"Won't be ready to receive you either in mind or body," he might have added.

"Oh, won't she?" said Jimmy. "But of course I forgot it was very early, and as you said, this is n't Alimara."

She laughed.

"Well, some other time then," she added.

And she stepped back to let him pass on his way alone.

But strangely enough this little action of dismissal which should have set him free held him rooted to the spot.

There had been disappointment, even a tinge of pique, in her tone and in the little laugh with which she had accompanied the allusion to Alimara. The word Alimara too was one to conjure with. It made him feel that his

own manner had been cold to the point of rudeness. He was behaving like a self-conscious idiot, a henpecked husband, a feeble fool. From Jimmy's point of view he must seem to be all these things and a bounder into the bargain. It was insufferable.

"Jimmy," he said suddenly, "it's not too early for a spin anyhow. Will you come along and let me show you things?"

"Rather!" she replied.

In two minutes she was seated beside him with his rug wrapped round her, his scarf over her hair.

"Now let her go for all she is worth, Jack! she commanded. "I want some air. At Longshaws I have been breathing cobwebs."

So he let her go. And no sooner had they started than once more he was under the spell, not only of the witchery of her presence, but of the memories she conjured up. The smell of wood-smoke in the air was transformed into the scent of camp-fires, the thin fog from the cold gray sea was changed into the morning mist of India, a dark line of woodland became the edge of the jungle, the gray road between the hedges a red road between red-stemmed mango-trees.

No wonder he forgot to look at the time and went very much further than he had intended, while Jimmy talked and asked a hundred questions, and relieved her mind of the cobwebs of Longshaws.

"Mr. Rutherford is a dear," she said. "He is kindness itself, and makes life with Mrs. R. possible. But Mrs. —well, the less said about her the better. Of course one must remember that she had that letter from Alimara. But somehow she always has a demoralizing effect upon me. She disposes me to evil. It's a pity, isn't it? A

Miss Fortescue—a cousin, I believe—is coming to-day to lunch from Cauldstanes. Do you know her?"

Jack groaned.

"*Do* I know her?" he said. "For heaven's sake——"

Then he stopped short, realizing how futile it was to impose restrictions. Precautions so far had only made things worse.

"For heaven's sake what?" said Jimmy.

"Just say whatever you like to her," he said recklessly.

"I mean to," said Jimmy, and then they dismissed the subject.

Only after she had disappeared up the drive to Longshaws again did it occur to Jack to look at his wrist-watch.

It was half-past nine.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, and made like the wind for Cauldstanes.

Wintergreen still attired *en matinée* with the addition of wash-leather gloves met him in the hall.

"Is your mistress down?" he said breathlessly.

"Oh yes, sir," she said. "But she 's just gone out."

"Out?" he exclaimed blankly.

"Yes, sir," said Wintergreen. "She told me to tell you that she 'd be back in a minute. And there are some people in the waiting-room, sir."

"Very well," said Jack. "Let me know when she comes in."

He went then and saw the patients who were waiting for him. Afterwards he mounted to the top flat to see Gardshore. To his surprise, however, he found both the rooms there vacant.

"Have you seen Mr. Gardshore?" he said with some

anxiety to Wintergreen, whom he found sweeping down the staircase.

"Mr. Gardshore is in the kitchen, sir," said Wintergren gravely; "he offered to assist to clean the silver."

"Gardshore—cleaning silver?" exclaimed Jack. "But that's impossible. I cannot allow——"

"It's not for you he is doing it, sir," said Wintergreen. "If you will pardon my saying so, it is for me. And if you will look into the kitchen, you will see it is doing him no harm. Look in, sir, as you pass. Alexander is helping too."

She resumed her sweeping, and Jack hurried downstairs again. Then opening the kitchen door he stood transfixed on the threshold. With his broad back toward him sat Alexander scouring a large fish-slice and breathing heavily upon it at intervals. Opposite him sat Gardshore in a pink mist of plate-powder, brushing at a teapot as though his life depended upon it.

Apparently they were in the midst of a discussion too.

"Ay," said Alexander, looking critically at his fish-slice as he spoke. "Ye can aye tell whether or no. Either it's silver or it's no' silver. An' it's my belief she's the genuine article."

"She is that," said Gardshore, without pausing in his brushing. "She's as fine as they make 'em, like this old teapot here. She's Queen Anne and no mistake. I say! Look what a shine I'm getting!"

He held up his work for admiration, but Alexander, absorbed in his subject, took no notice.

"The genuine article," he repeated. "If there was more like her in the kitchens o' this country we'd a' ken a big difference."

He dumped his fish-slice on the table in his enthusiasm.

"Hear, hear!" said Gardshore.

"Schools or nae schools!" said Alexander.

"No, you old barbarian," said Gardshore. "It is education that has made this woman. Without it she would have been merely a common or garden cook. With it she is a super-cook."

"Ye 're richt, sir," said Alexander.

Alice like Jack that morning had been the sport of her generous instincts. Kindly feeling in the first instance had prompted Jack not to leave Jimmy on the road, and kindly feeling prompted Alice, when she had finished breakfast and seen Wintergreen about the lunch, to run across the street and ask for the despised and maligned Lydia.

Though Jack so much disliked her going, she felt it to be her duty to go. She was sure Lydia would be expecting her. She had been so long in the habit of running over, and she wanted to thank her too for meeting the new cook at the station, and to tell her incidentally how delightful the new cook was. It would relieve Lydia's mind. She was always so anxious—poor kind Lydia. She would only stay five minutes, and be back before Jack could know she had been away.

This was her plan.

In accordance with it, without telling Wintergreen where she was going, she hastened to the Fortescues' house, was admitted by the housemaid, and presently ushered into the presence of Clara. Clara's little eyes gloated over her visitor as she entered. She was glad that Lydia had gone out shopping. In her pleasures she was selfish. She loved to enjoy alone.

"Good morning, my dear," she said cordially.

Alice asked where Lydia was.

"Lydia has gone out shopping," said Clara. "You see she has to be ready at twelve. The motor from Longshaws is to call for her. She is going there to luncheon to-day to meet their visitor from India, Miss Carmyle, who arrived yesterday."

"Oh, really?" said Alice at once, but as Clara said afterwards she grew suddenly as white as a sheet. This was exaggeration. Nevertheless the shock was great, and it was only by chance that Alice did not betray her ignorance.

As it was, her "Oh, really?" might have referred to Lydia and not at all to Miss Carmyle. It was unsatisfactory, and gave no answer to the question which was on her hostess's mind—"Has he or has he not told her?"

"Yes, of course you would hear about it from your husband," Clara went on. "I hear he was meeting her at Brakely. Very kind I am sure when he is so much occupied. I hear she is extremely pretty."

It was fortunate for Alice's self-possession that Clara added this last remark. It goaded her into antagonism, into defiance, into glib mendacity. Considering that it was the first time she had had to tell a lie consciously and deliberately, she did it extremely well.

"Yes, charming, I hear," she said. "I was sorry I could not go with Jack as he wanted me to do. I had to stay at home, of course, to prepare things for the new cook. But I hope to see Miss Carmyle soon. Jack has promised to take me to Longshaws. It was fortunate that he happened to be passing Brakely anyhow yesterday. I suggested that he should meet her there."

It was wonderful how cheerfully and naturally she spoke amid the surge of emotion that was all but engulfing her. Some of the pluckiest actions take place under the rose where no one hears of them. Alice held her ground bravely. She even managed to sit and discuss Jimmy and her various attractions for some little time, before, fearing that Lydia would return and everything have to be repeated, she at last took her leave.

But as she crossed the street to the Bow House in a kind of trance it seemed to her as though she had died since she came out of it, and were now returning as a ghost to the familiar gate, the familiar door-step.

"But I must n't think yet," she kept repeating to herself. "I must n't think yet."

With thought she knew would come the deluge.

She softly opened the front door.

There was a sound of voices in the consulting-room. Jack's voice and another man's. Jack was laughing.

So he could laugh and be happy, and deceive her at the same time! That was nothing. He could hold her in his arms! Kiss her! Oh, it was too cruel. Why had he not told her then? How had he been able to help telling her that he had just come from meeting this other woman at Brakely? At Brakely too! She would not have minded Longshaws so much. Brakely with its remoteness suggested a secret rendezvous. Oh, it was horrible! And people had seen it too! ——had known of her humiliation even before she knew of it!

Again her own part in the matter did not occur to her, her own irritability and unreasonableness. She only remembered that she had held out her arms to him and that he had returned her caresses with reservations.

Wintergreen that day had her fill of responsibility. Her mistress did not appear again that morning, except to pass her on the stairs without seeing her. She was staring straight before her like a somnambulist.

"What has happened to her now?" thought Wintergreen.

After an interval she followed her.

She found her in a remote attic with one dirty little gable window. Here she lay flung face downwards on an old sofa and sobbing as though her heart would break.

Wintergreen hesitated for a moment, then withdrew as quietly as she had come, noiselessly closing the door behind her.

Some hours later she rang the bell for luncheon.

Jack for a wonder appeared immediately.

"Is Mrs. Adair not in yet?" he said, frowning, as he glanced round the empty dining-room. "Have you any idea where she went?"

It disconcerted him to find Alice still absent, and it made him uncomfortable as well. Out in the village she might hear anything at any moment. Was there ever such bad luck? And Jimmy was coming to call that afternoon too. He had not been able to put her off.

"New-comers always call first at Alimara," she had said. "And I do want to be friends with Alice. I do want to get our introduction over. You are such an uncertain person. You might not be able to bring her to Longshaws this afternoon. And then time would pass on and one would never know what might happen with Mrs. R. in the background demoralizing me as she does."

He had been constrained to admit this.

But now—here was the devil again—he had meant to explain this, or as much of it as was necessary, and to

prepare Alice for Jimmy's visit. And of course again at this crucial moment Alice was not to be found. Again here was no one to receive him but this Wintergreen with her inscrutable eyes and her punctilious manners.

"Have you any idea where my wife went?" he said again rather testily as he waited on the rug.

Wintergreen hesitated for the fraction of a second. She too had been rapidly cogitating since his last speech. Should she or should she not betray Alice's presence in the house? Was the poor girl not hiding perhaps from this husband of hers? Was he perhaps the cause of her distress? Otherwise why should she flee to a back attic and not into his arms? Or again, if he were not the cause of everything, was it not evident at least that she wished to conceal her grief from him—to spare him perhaps the misery from which she was suffering? In either case would it not be better to keep her place of refuge closed in the meantime? Now, therefore, when he repeated his last question she decided to answer it only.

"I am not sure where she went when she went out, sir," she said, "but I saw her go across the street to the house opposite; the Miss Fortescues' I think, sir."

She saw his face change at the name, and realized too late that in her ignorance she had made some mistake.

"Oh, indeed?" was all he said however, as he took his seat at the table. "Well, I can't wait. I have to be off again at two o'clock."

As he began to eat, Gardshore entered the room, with traces in his hair still of pink plate-powder, but otherwise quite presentable.

"This is splendid!" cried Jack, casting aside apparently all thought of the renegade Alice. But throughout lunch-

eon, while he talked and laughed, his anger was waxing hotter and hotter against her.

To think that after last night—after all he had said to her—she had again preferred Lydia's company to his! And now to-day of all days when it was so important that he should see her! For a moment he thought of sending Wintergreen to the house opposite to see whether she were really there. But next moment he changed his mind. No, if she chose to disregard his expressed wishes like this she must take the consequences. He would wash his hands of her and her susceptibilities and her suspicions and her sentimentalities. She was infuriating when he thought of it. He tried therefore not to think, but to devote himself to entertaining Gardshore. He said no more to him of Jimmy however. They lunched together pleasantly enough, and Jack was amazed at the improvement in his patient.

"The silver cure has worked miracles," he said to Wintergreen afterward when Gardshore had returned to finish up his teapots.

Wintergreen, clearing away the dishes, assented politely, but something in her aspect reminded Jack that he must leave a message.

"Oh, by the way," he said as he filled his cigarette-case preparatory to departure, "will you tell your mistress when she comes in that Miss Carmyle from Longshaws is coming to call this afternoon? And that I hope she will keep her here for tea, as by four o'clock I hope to be in?"

"Very good, sir," said Wintergreen.

After he had gone she slipped upstairs to the little attic. The sobs had ceased. Her little mistress lay silent, her face buried in her arms. She was asleep.

"And I 'll let her sleep," said Wintergreen to herself. "She shall rest at least until it 's calling-time. She is not fit to receive callers in the state she is in."

As she went downstairs again, however, she realized misgivings at the back of her mind. Jack's change of countenance at the name of Fortescue now recurred to her, bringing with it belated doubts. Ought she to have told him after all of his young wife's distress? Why had she concealed the fact that at the moment he was asking for her she was sobbing her heart out in a back attic? Of course the reason—when she thought of it—had been that she wanted to shield the poor girl from discovery, looking doubtless like nothing on earth, when he had still the radiant loveliness of the other in his memory.

But after all what concern had it been of hers? Surely a cook-housekeeper had nothing to do with the private affairs of those whom she had undertaken merely to keep clean and fed?

"It serves me right for not minding my own business," she said to herself as she went downstairs again.

The silver was finished. Alexander had gone. Only Gardshore remained, smoking a cigarette by the fireplace.

"I beg your pardon for lingering," he said as she entered. "My job is done. I have no further excuse to stay. But I am sweer, as Alexander would say, to go back to my parlor. This kitchen is a delightful place. It is the only really habitable room in the house. That golden wall—or is it yellow ocher?—those brazen jelly-pans up there, those blue plates, that eight-day clock, how charming they all are, how useful as well as ornamental! I cannot go back to my vases and my china ornaments and my wall-paper with blue roses on it that

have leaves like the Kaiser's mustache. My whole soul revolts from seeing again 'The Happy Days of Charles I' over the mantelpiece. When I do see it I shall relapse. I am certain of it."

Wintergreen laughed as she tied on a large apron.

"Accompany me to the scullery then," she said. "You must work for your privileges."

"Oh, I 'll do anything if you 'll let me stay," exclaimed Gardshore. "I 'll run on my knees to serve you."

"I 'd much rather you dried the dishes," she returned.

And soon they were hard at it.

Half an hour passed, another half-hour, and there was still no sign from the sleeper upstairs. The dish-washing had long been over.

"Now I must bake," said Wintergreen. "There 's somebody coming to tea perhaps. You can't help me with this, but you can sit and talk to me."

He sat and talked therefore.

Another half-hour passed.

"I must wake her," said Wintergreen to herself as she put away her baking board. "That caller will be arriving on us."

Even as she spoke the door-bell rang suddenly.

"Watch these scones, will you?" she said to Gardshore. "You can imagine yourself King Alfred."

Then she departed.

But there was no one on the door-step but the brown woman of the night before, now in magenta which was singularly unbecoming to her, and a bonnet with magenta leaves of a different shade and a tuft of pheasant's feathers in it.

"Oh, good afternoon; is Mrs. Adair in?" she said in a fluttered nervous manner.

"May I see her?" she added, without waiting for an answer which was rather long in coming. "I am in the habit of just running upstairs."

And run upstairs she did before Wintergreen could stop her or make up her mind whether she should be stopped or not.

Alice, only just awake, was on her way to her room when Lydia's familiar voice below struck upon her ears, and in terror of being found with her face swollen and discolored by weeping she hastily let down her hair and shook it like a veil over her. Then flinging the nearest towel round her she had begun to brush it hastily as on the night of the letters when Lydia, breathless with haste and agitation, entered the bedroom and sank down upon the sofa.

"Oh, my dear!" she said without preamble, "I am just on my way home from lunching at Longshaws."

"Yes? Did you enjoy yourself?" said Alice from the depths of her hair. Her voice sounded cheerfully indifferent.

"No," said Lydia. "At least I enjoyed the lunch itself. They always have delicious food. But I do dislike Cousin Charles when he is frolicsome, and as for Cousin Sarah I never saw her in a worse temper."

"And was Miss Carmyle there?" came Alice's voice without a tremor from the shades.

"Very much there," said Lydia. "She was the cause of it all—all the frolicsomeness and the bad temper I mean. She's lovely of course—exquisitely dressed and all that—but bizarre, my dear, very bizarre—a real trial to have for a visitor. I was sorry indeed for poor Cousin Sarah. Cousin Charles in my opinion quite forgot himself at lunch, and the dignity which a head of a house

should keep up. The maids were all giggling. I saw them quite well, although they took care to turn their backs toward us of course."

She paused for breath, but as Alice made no response she plunged on again with nervous haste.

"But what I came for, my dear," she said, "was to tell you from Miss Carmyle that she was coming to call this afternoon, and hoped you would be in, as she was dying to see you."

Here Alice, through a rift in her veil, caught sight for a second of Lydia's face in the mirror, her bead-like eyes almost starting from her head in their vain effort to penetrate the invisible.

"Now it's coming, whatever it is," thought Alice, and enclosed herself again.

"I bring the message," Lydia went on, "but—but I suppose you will know of this already, for she told me she had told the doctor this morning when she was out with him for three hours in the motor."

There was no immediate response to this from the shades. Alice was holding a long thick strand in her hand and dragging the comb through it rather fiercely. At last, however, she spoke, and her voice sounded quite debonair.

"Oh yes, I told Jack to take her," she said. "And—and he gave me her message, thank you."

"So that, after all, you see," said Lydia about an hour afterwards when she had reported everything to Clara, "Alice knew everything already about this morning, and did n't seem to be in the least disturbed. I need not have hurried home to warn her and tell her about it before Miss Carmyle came to call."

"Then why did you do it?" said Clara discontentedly. "If you had stayed on you might have had some news to tell me."

Lydia, who had been talking for an hour, felt this to be rather hard. She remained silent therefore, not to say sulky.

"By news I mean information," Clara explained. "We know no more about the *affaire Carmyle* than we did before. This motor-ride has no significance, especially when his wife sent him. But is Miss Carmyle in love with him? That's what I want to know."

"For Alice's sake I hope not," said Lydia gloomily.

"You mean Miss Carmyle is so irresistible?" said Clara eagerly.

"Judging by Cousin Charles," said Lydia.

"Horrid old man," said Clara. "I never could stand Cousin Charles. He tried once to flirt with me. He did n't try it twice, I tell you."

Again Lydia was silent, contrasting in her own mind the old and the new loves of Cousin Charles; Clara reviling him in her Shetland shawl, Jimmy bandying jests with him across the luncheon-table.

"It's all Cousin Sarah's fault of course," Clara went on, referring to the first part of their conversation. "She always does rush things. I never saw a woman take things so for granted. And not only that, but she rushes other people. I gather you hardly made the acquaintance of Miss Carmyle. Now if you had stayed longer you might have come back tête-à-tête with her. Nothing fosters intimacy like a tête-à-tête. Let this afternoon be a lesson to you. Never be rushed again, Lydia."

As soon as she was alone Alice twisted up her hair

again, and was coming downstairs in hat and coat and thick veil when Wintergreen met her.

"The doctor told me to tell you, madam," said Wintergreen, "that a Miss Carmyle is coming to call this afternoon and that——"

"Will you say," said Alice with tears still in her voice, "will you say to the doctor and—and any one who may ask for me—that I have been obliged to go out?"

"But surely you are not going out without lunch, madam?" said Wintergreen, planting herself stolidly in her path, her honest face full of concern, for there was something desperate about the little figure.

"Oh, no," said Alice hastily. "At least—I 'm going out to lunch. I forgot to tell you before—I 'm sorry."

And so she escaped.

"Well," said Wintergreen to herself as she stood watching her leave the house, "where can she be going to lunch with a face like that?"

A sense of irritation at a woman who could appear at any social function looking such a fright took possession of her.

"It 's no wonder if he honeymoons occasionally," she said to herself.

All her sympathies were with Jack for the moment.

But Alice was past caring whether any one sympathized with her or not. She had soon left the houses and the highroad behind her, and was hastening down a sandy path which took her to the seashore.

There was a big rock there, she knew, where sea-pinks grew, and climbing up into the heart of it she found a little garden of them. Here she flung herself down amid the flowers, too absolutely miserable even for weeping.

The tide came in and surrounded her little fastness. Sea-gulls and crows wheeled and cawed and shrieked over it. But the waves had left it high and dry and the sun had set before she rose up again to return to the Bow House.

All this time she had shed no tears, had given vent to no soliloquies. The change that the hours had wrought in her was a silent change, but it was none the less a very thorough transformation.

She had come to her garden of sea-pinks an agonized child. She left it a bitter woman.

"He shall not see that I care," she said to herself. "I have told three lies already. I shall go on lying."

CHAPTER IX

In which Wintergreen has a Tea-party and Alice institutes an Anniversary

THOUGH the world may come to an end in one sense it can go on in another, and though it seemed to Alice that afternoon that nothing of importance could ever happen again, things were happening all the same.

"Who is it that is coming to tea?" said Gardshore when Wintergreen came into the kitchen again after Lydia's visit and Alice's departure. "Is it any one interesting?"

"I don't know," said Wintergreen. "It's a Miss Carmyle from Longshaws."

Gardshore was occupied in removing scones from the oven at that moment. His silence, therefore, was not noticeable, though it lasted for some length of time. Wintergreen meanwhile went out and in, now to the telephone, now to the pantry, now to the front door, now to the back.

"Are you never going to sit down?" said Gardshore at last. "I am disappointed in you. Last night I thought you were a restful person."

"You should never trust to first impressions," said Wintergreen. "They are generally wrong. Mine invariably are. But why do you stay here," she added as the bell rang again and she made for the door once more, "on this lovely afternoon? Why don't you go for a walk on the sands?"

"Because it would be bad for me," he replied. "I

should feel like *Mary* calling the cattle home, or like Edgar Allan at the tomb of *Annabel.* Helping you I feel like *Mr. Micawber* in one of his lighter moods. You have an enlivening effect on me."

She laughed and went off again. But before she came back the bell rang once more.

He started up to listen as he had already done a dozen times, and in a few moments the voice of all the voices in the world spoke.

"Is Mrs. Adair——" it began high and clear, and it was as though every drop of blood in his body responded to it. But here it broke off short.

"O—oh!" it exclaimed as though in utter amazement.

At the same time there was an answering exclamation, then a rapid interchange of question and answer of which to his chagrin he could not hear a word.

At last, however, the speakers came into the inner hall.

"I 'm glad she 's not in yet," said Jimmy. "I want to talk to you in the kitchen. Do let me. Just till she comes back. Is n't it funny how we should meet to-day when only yesterday we said good-by for ever?"

Gardshore thought afterwards that if he had been able at that moment he would have taken cover in the scullery. As it was he stood paralyzed on the hearth-rug.

Wintergreen laughed and threw open the kitchen door.

"I have already a visitor," she said. "May I introduce you? Mr. Gardshore, Miss Carmyle. Miss Carmyle, Mr. Gardshore."

"How do you do?" said Jimmy, bowing stiffly.

"How do you do?" said Gardshore with glacial effect.

Wintergreen was surprised. She had expected other things of them.

"Wrong as usual!" she said to herself. "How tiresome! I should not have brought her in."

Aloud she said with an attempt to thaw the atmosphere:

"Mr. Gardshore has kindly been helping me with the scones."

"Indeed?" said Jimmy, beginning to recover herself after a shock which had been overwhelming. "Are you good at scones, Mr. Gardshore?"

She was thinking as she spoke that she would not have known him. Was this ghost of a man the passionate lover who had rushed out of her presence into the dark three years before, after calling her the curse of his life and all sorts of other things? Then he had been in the heyday of youth and strength; now she could have wept over him.

"Yes—no," he stammered with white lips.

At this moment to Wintergreen's relief the mad clock on the stairs struck four.

"It's twenty minutes fast," she said to herself. "But it has saved a *mauvais quart d'heure.*"

"I am sure, Miss Carmyle," she said aloud, "that Mrs. Adair would wish me to offer you tea. May I take it into the dining-room for you?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed Jimmy. "Do let's have it here."

And then of a sudden she began chattering wildly of their journey, of their railway accident, of Brakely, of anything and everything, and presently Gardshore joined in.

Ten minutes later found them buttering scones together, while Wintergreen made tea in a big brown teapot.

"They 're getting on," said the hostess to herself. "They 're passed through the first stiffness."

But to both her guests it seemed as though the stiffness were only now begun. In their embarrassed speechlessness they had been nearer to each other than in their volubility.

"She 's putting me in my place," Gardshore reflected bitterly. "She always used to say that when she wanted to keep people at their distance she was especially polite and talkative to them."

"He has forgotten," reflected Jimmy with a pang of grief. "He is glad I have given him the opportunity of ignoring everything."

Meanwhile she was talking rapidly.

"And I came back along the corridor," she said to Wintergreen, "after you had gone to find out your name and address. Was n't that inconsistent of me, after all we had said about darkness and the death-hour? It served me right that I should see you again to-day. I hope I did not say anything very silly. You know we agreed that we could say whatever we liked because we would never have any opportunity of knowing whether we afterwards contradicted ourselves."

Wintergreen laughed, but a little perfunctorily. She was disappointed in both her guests. Jimmy's talk to-day was so different from yesterday's. It was futile, jejune, with no particular point. As for Gardshore, though he talked and even grinned at intervals, his face might have been carved in ivory.

"What 's the matter with him?" said Wintergreen to herself. "He 's like a graven image. He 's like a death's-head at a feast."

She made up her mind that he must be afflicted with

shyness. Yet he had never been so with her. It was all very puzzling. She was tired, and by the end of tea she was tired of her company as well. She was wishing them both at Jericho, especially Jimmy and all the problems she brought with her.

"And it will be so awkward if the doctor comes in before his wife," she said to herself.

Even as the thought passed through her mind, as though in answer to it, the doctor entered the house.

They all heard him open the front door.

"There 's Alice," thought Jimmy with relief, and she threw away the cigarette she had been smoking.

"Here 's the knight-at-arms," thought Gardshore, and a sudden unexpected wave of wild jealousy overwhelmed him.

He rose to his feet.

"Good-by," he said abruptly. "I—I have some writing to do."

"Good-by," said Jimmy, holding out a hand which she was disgusted to see was trembling.

But Gardshore saw nothing apparently, not even the hand. Next moment he was gone, and she could hear him mounting the staircase.

Wintergreen went out to meet the new-comer.

"Miss Carmyle has come, sir," she said. "We found we had met before, and, as Mrs. Adair has not come in yet, she has had tea with me."

Jack's brow darkened. He was already in a bad temper. Something had happened to the motor which might lay it up for two days. He had had words with Alexander about it, and Alexander, by reason of his strong voice and his deliberation, invariably came off best in argument. And now to come in and find that Jimmy

had been received by this officious old woman instead of by Alice was too much.

"Incredible!" he exclaimed, his eyes blazing. "Do you mean to tell me that Mrs. Adair has n't come in *yet?*"

To Wintergreen in her present mood both his anger and his tone were offensive. They made her angry too, not only with him but with Alice as well. After all, why should she shield her any longer?

"Mrs. Adair told me to say to any one who came in," she said, "that she had had to go out."

"She had my message then?" said Jack quickly. "You have seen her since lunch?"

"Yes, sir," said Wintergreen recklessly. "I gave her your message, and then she went out leaving the message, I have given you. She has not been in since."

What Jack would have answered will never be known, for at that moment Jimmy appeared.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "I have had such a lovely tea in your delightful kitchen. You see Wintergreen and I are quite old friends. We went through a railway accident together. But now good-by, everybody," she added quickly. "I must be off home. I must come again and see Alice another time."

Here Wintergreen discreetly withdrew to her own place.

"I can't understand," said Jack with what composure he could muster, "where Alice can be now. Something very important must have detained her. I know she was dying to see you."

"Oh, well—another day," said Jimmy airily. But there was again that in her manner which had been there on the highroad. And behind the surface disappointment this time was a deep surging bitterness which concerned

neither Jack nor Alice, but of which Jack was nevertheless aware.

In his ignorance he attributed everything to Alice, and for the first time a distinct desire to retaliate came to him.

"If she is going on like this, at least she shall have some reason for it," he said to himself.

Then aloud he said: "But why should you hurry away just when I 've come?"

"Cauldstanes is not Alimara," she laughed.

"Oh, forget all that rubbish," he said. "I was talking nonsense."

"All right," she said, "but I must go now. You see I did n't tell them at Longshaws that I was coming here. I wanted to come alone, and I was afraid that Mrs. R. would come too. I 'm sorry Alice is n't in. I made sure she would be. I sent a message to her by Miss Fortescue."

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Jack.

And his anger flared higher and higher.

"Well, if you must go, you must," he said. "But at least allow me to walk back with you. I would motor you if I could, but the wretched thing 's gone wrong somehow, and my fool chauffeur says that he may not get it right for days."

"Oh, you poor dear!" said Jimmy.

As she said it Wintergreen reappeared.

"Do you wish tea, sir?" she said stiffly, for she was still offended. And her Buddha-like aspect at that juncture put the lid on things.

"Oh, no, thank you," said Jack, "and when Mrs. Adair comes in, tell her I 've gone to Longshaws with Miss Carmyle, and will be late for supper."

That day had been a field-day for Miss Clara Fortescue. As soon as Lydia had finished her report she had established her sister behind the curtain with the white palm leaves on it. From that spot she had never budged all afternoon, though Lydia had come and gone.

She alone had seen Alice go out. Lydia had been changing her dress at the time.

"My dear," Clara said when she returned, "the message from Miss Carmyle has taken effect. Alice has gone out, with her oldest coat and skirt on—the one with the patch at the back."

"Oh, not that one surely!" exclaimed Lydia, horrified. "She never goes out with that."

"Well, she did to-day," said Clara with zest. "Not only that but she had that awful old hat on without any ribbon that she used to run over here with when it was raining or snowing in the winter—you know the one. She must have put it on inadvertently, and a veil so thick you could n't see her."

"Where did she go?" said Lydia faintly.

"Oh, up the street," said Clara, "westward; toward the cliffs."

The word was horribly suggestive. Lydia said no more, but presently she left the room and the house, and slipping along under Clara's window she made for the open country. Soon she was scrambling among the tumbled rocks at the cliff-foot. But though she slid and splashed among the seaweed and dragged herself up and slid down precipitous places for about an hour no Alice was to be seen. The garden of the sea-pinks was not known to Lydia, and though she passed quite close to the place the rock fastness kept its secret and its occupant in peace.

About four o'clock Lydia returned to find that a new sensation had obliterated the memory of the former one.

"Miss Carmyle has arrived!" exclaimed Clara as soon as she entered the drawing-room. "At least I am sure it was Miss Carmyle! What is she like? Mercifully I had my opera-glasses. Is she medium height, slim, in a French gray cloth coat and skirt, very smart, with a very smart straw-trimmed hat, shoes, stockings, and gloves to match? Bronze hair, brown eyes, pink and white complexion, that looks as if it were touched up? Powdered, I *think,* in places—altogether a rather demi-mondaine look?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Lydia. "That 's her. But she would n't be admitted, of course?"

"Was n't she?" said Clara. "Just wait a bit. She is a friend of this Wintergreen's who came last night—a *great* friend evidently. Did you know that?"

"Miss Carmyle—a friend of Wintergreen's!" exclaimed Lydia, astonished.

Clara nodded.

"They shook hands," she said. "They went into the house together."

"Went into the house together!" exclaimed Lydia. "And Alice out?"

"And Alice out," Clara repeated eagerly. "And what they are doing there now no one knows. Ring the bell for tea, Lydia. I feel quite faint."

"But do you mean to say, Clara," said Lydia as she obeyed, "that Miss Carmyle is actually visiting Wintergreen in her mistress's absence?"

"Yes, Lydia, I do," said Clara. "And there is more in this than meets the eye. I have been thinking over

everything since this happened, and I am confident there is collusion."

"Collusion?" exclaimed Lydia. "Oh, surely not, Clara."

"Did they not both arrive last night," said Clara, "both Miss Carmyle and Wintergreen? From what you told me they must have come by the same train. Now if that is n't collusion, what is?"

"But how—why should they collude?" said Lydia miserably. "O Clara, don't you think this may be just a coincidence?"

"If it gives you any comfort to think so, Lydia—do so," said Clara.

The maid came in then to prepare for tea. The table was placed where they both could reach it and within a yard of the palm leaves and roses.

"I feel it in my bones," said Clara as she stirred her first cup, "that something more will happen presently, Lydia."

"Oh, it is happening now!" exclaimed Lydia, starting up. "There 's the doctor coming!"

"Ah, I thought so!" said Clara, hastily setting down her tea and resuming her opera-glass. "And he is agitated—discomposed. Lydia—mark my words!—he knows Miss Carmyle is waiting for him."

But here Lydia made a stand.

"Yes, but, Clara, he thinks Alice is there too," she said. "Remember it is impossible he can know that she is out."

"Impossible?" cried Clara contemptuously. "Nothing is impossible in a case like this. Do you, for instance, know where Alice is?"

"No," Lydia admitted.

"How do you know then that *he* does n't know?" said Clara.

"All the same I don't believe he knows that Alice is out," said Lydia stoutly.

And to emphasize her disbelief she resumed her seat, turned her back to the window, and began helping herself to cake.

She was interrupted by a shriek from Clara.

"Aha!" she exclaimed.

In spite of herself Lydia turned hastily toward the window.

Jack and Jimmy were just emerging, talking apparently with the utmost gaiety, a vision of brilliant youth and light-heartedness against the background of dingy houses. They had disappeared up the street before either of the sisters spoke.

Then Clara drew a long breath.

"What do you think of that, Lydia?" she said.

"I think," said Lydia, starting up again and scattering crumbs of cake to right and left, "that men are hateful and so are women."

Then she fled from the room weeping.

Clara, however, saw out the day. She saw Alice return like a shadow in the gloaming. She saw Wintergreen come out to light the lamp over the gate. She saw Jack return. Even after that she still sat watching until the maid came in with the lamp, and, like the caretaker of a theater, pulled down the blind and put an end to her séance.

After Jack and Jimmy departed there was a pause in events at the Bow House. No bell rang, nothing hap-

pened for a long time. There were two comfortable basket chairs in the kitchen, and in one of them Wintergreen seated herself. And so tired was she that no sooner was she comfortably established than she fell asleep. No sooner, also, had this happened than, armed with a writing-board and a scribbling-pad, Gardshore entered.

"I know I am a nuisance," he said as he did so, addressing the crown of Wintergreen's black cap, which was all that was visible of her over her chair-back. "But I cannot stand my bower of blue roses nor Charles I any longer."

The black cap did not move, and there was no response but a gentle snore.

Nevertheless he came and sat down in the other basket chair.

"I can attend to bells for her," he muttered to himself, "while she keeps me in my seven senses."

Then he began to write feverishly.

"It is over," he wrote. "We have met and parted."

But here he suddenly threw away his writing-pad, and, clasping his hands behind his head, he sat staring at Wintergreen in a kind of desperation.

"I can't help it," he said to himself. "I can't do it."

In his troubled mind the scene of the afternoon reënacted itself. Again he saw Jimmy more lovely, more wonderful than ever, seated in the chair opposite. Again he heard her talking and laughing, while he talked and laughed too, with death in his heart. Again he realized, as he had done in the afternoon, that the last glimmer of hope was now quenched for ever. Her manner had showed this conclusively, indescribably. They had met as strangers, they had parted estranged.

He was humiliated to find that his will to live on as the protector of the new knight-at-arms was now also extinguished. He had no longer any interest in his mission. He no longer felt he could be a beneficent ghost. How could he be a ghost at all?—he who dared not touch her hand lest he should fall on his knees before her, he whose whole being was even now in a turmoil at the thought of her and Adair on the road to Longshaws together? Yet, ghost or not, he would have to go through with it. He would have to do something at least before he went out. It would be hellish to allow this to happen to Adair without a word—Adair so honest and unsuspecting.

He started up in his seat with wild eyes. But as he did so other eyes dully and drowsily met his, blinking at him from the chair opposite. Then remembrance came into them and their owner sat up also.

"I have been asleep surely," she said, adjusting her black cap.

He tried to laugh.

"You have," he answered. "But I have been on the watch all the time. Forgive me for coming again."

She stopped adjusting and sat looking at him.

"Have you come for your coffee?" she said. "I have it all ready for you. It needs just to be heated."

"I don't want it to-night, thank you," he said grimly.

"Now is n't that like a man?" she said. "When I have roasted and ground it for you. But I 'm glad all the same," she added. "Coffee 's no cure for you."

"No, you 're quite right," he said, endeavoring to speak lightly. "I 'd rather have wintergreen. That 's a kind of cure too, is n't it?"

She laughed.

"Yes," she said. "For pains and aches."

"Well, God knows," he said, "I have aches enough!"

She made no rejoinder to this, but talked of other things until, fearing that Jack might return, he went upstairs again.

"And write no more to-night," she adjured him, seeing him picking up his writing-pad, "because I shall need you to-morrow very badly. The bookcases are all in a shocking state."

"Are they?" he said, and she could see he was trying to respond. But she noted with disappointment that he was no longer in the *Micawber* mood.

He had been gone for some time and the house was sunk in silence, when, answering another ring at the bell, Wintergreen found Alice on the doorstep. She no longer wore her veil and her face was ghastly in the lamplight. But it was quite firm and tearless now, and her small figure had an air of dignity about it.

Wintergreen, who had been about to exclaim at her reappearance, was awed into respectful silence. She stood back to let her pass.

"Will you bring me some supper, please," said Alice with the air of a princess. "Is the doctor in?" she added casually.

"No, madam," said Wintergreen.

But at that moment Jack entered.

Wintergreen as rapidly as possible withdrew, and the husband and wife went into the dining-room together.

"Is this your day off, may I ask?" said Jack. "I was surprised to find you had gone out when I came in this

morning. I had met Miss Carmyle, who had arrived yesterday, and she wished me to tell you that she was coming to call this afternoon."

Thus baldly and twenty-four hours late she heard the news. Jack was conscious even now of omissions, but really it was Alice's fault if he did omit things. Why had she not been in at lunch-time when he would have told her properly?

"Oh, indeed," said Alice. "I am sorry you were surprised. I had not realized that you expected me to ask for leave every time I went out of the house. I have never expected nor desired such consideration from you. But although I was not present when you returned this morning after your three hours' drive with Miss Carmyle, I received her message all right and left one for her."

She went forward to the fire as she spoke and held out her hands to the flames, and he, about to burst into a blaze of anger, saw that she was trembling from head to foot.

A sudden compunction came to him. She was so small and shabby-looking to-night, so disheveled, so unlike herself. A little coil of her hair had come loose. There was a dreary, dejected look about her. And after all, she was the one woman on earth.

"Alice," he said, suddenly coming over to the fireplace beside her, "tell me—where in the world have you been, child?"

"In hell," she might have answered, but she said nothing aloud till she could command her voice sufficiently to speak clearly and distinctly. Then she spoke:

"I had rather not tell you," she said, " unless you force me to. Of course if you insist——"

"Oh, by no means," he said turning away again. "I do not need to ask. You have been with your friends the Fortescues. I can see that without asking."

"Pray do not ask then," she said, holding her head very high. "I have no desire that you should say one word more to me than is necessary."

"Thank God!" said Jack. "Then I 'll say good night."

And he marched out of the dining-room ignoring the supper-table. His action was the more impressive that Alice had not allowed him to tell her that he had just dined at Longshaws. At another time it would have touched her to solicitude. But now her heart was as hard as Pharaoh's.

"Good night," she said frigidly, without turning from the fire.

And when he had gone she ate a large supper herself. She lingered long over it too. She had much to think of, much, she told herself, to which she must adjust her mind. That night, she reflected, would see the end of an old order of things. It would mark a turning-point in her life. She had been young. Now she was going to be old. Old at twenty-three. It was rather pathetic.

"I shall always remember this night," she said to herself.

She resolved to keep it as an anniversary in future. Her mind was made up. She had decided on a course of action. If her life henceforth was to be all a pretense no one—not even Jack—should see she minded it. On the morrow she would come down to breakfast, eat food, make remarks about the weather, and then go all day wrapped in the serene dignity of one who expected nothing more from fate. There was melancholy gratification in the prospect, enhanced by the thought that Jack

would be ashamed of himself and Jimmy feel a worm in presence of her calm abstraction.

Thus established for good above the winds and waves of passion Alice at last went upstairs to bed, turning out flickering gas-jets on her way with a remorseless air, as though they had been love-lights.

CHAPTER X

In which the Rev. Mr. Pennifeather Inadvertently Thickens the Plot

MRS. RUTHERFORD had been out when Jimmy and Jack arrived at Longshaws, but they had been hailed with delight by the master of the house, and the three, like mice at play, had dined uproariously together. Almost immediately afterwards, however, Jack had departed, and Jimmy had also excused herself. She had a hundred letters to write she said. Mr. Rutherford thus was left all alone to meet his wife. That lady returned in no very amiable mood. She had been at a meeting which she described with some heat, at which Miss Pennifeather had taken the chair, a position which she as lady of Longshaws considered should have been occupied by herself.

It had also been arranged in opposition to her wishes that the garden fête which had been the subject of the discussion should be held at Pitcaple, an old empty house standing in neglected grounds about a mile from Cauldstanes and belonging to an absentee landlord.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Rutherford, "I think it a very good plan. What was your alternative?"

"To have it here, of course," snapped Mrs. Rutherford.

"Then thank heaven you did n't carry it!" he exclaimed. "It would have been awful to have it here.

Think of the roses and the rock-garden all trampled over by a horde of savages!"

"My dear Charles," said his wife, "you really are too absurd. A few of the *canaille* might have come, of course" (Mrs. Rutherford had the Fortescue preference for French expressions), "but the great proportion would have been of the *élite*. Mrs. Houghton of Hillside and all sorts of people are to help. But I might have known it," she added; "the very last person I can come to for sympathy is my husband. He rejoices whenever he hears that I have been worsted."

"My dear," said her husband, "I may be glad that Pitcaple has been fixed upon and yet sorry that you have been worsted in the matter. Kindly, therefore, do not allude to me in my presence in the third person. I have a very strong objection to it. By the way," he went on quickly, for he detested altercations and always avoided them if possible, "talking of third persons, we had a third at dinner to-night—the doctor—what do you think of that?"

The diversion was entirely successful.

"The doctor?" exclaimed Mrs. Rutherford. "How in the world did he get here?"

"Walked here with Jimmy from Cauldstanes," said Mr. Rutherford.

"From Cauldstanes?" exclaimed his wife.

"Yes, she was there at tea," said Mr. Rutherford, "and as the motor had broken down the doctor walked home with her."

"Really, very injudicious," replied his wife, frowning, "in his position. He ought to have known better. Why didn't Mrs. Adair at least come too?"

"Mrs. Adair was n't there," said Mr. Rutherford.

"Not there?" exclaimed his wife.

"No, only a housekeeper, a friend of Jimmy's—called Wintergreen," he replied.

"A housekeeper? A friend of Jimmy's?" she exclaimed. "Charles, this is really too much! I insist upon your talking to Jimmy. She has no knowledge of what is fitting."

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I never saw a better made frock than she had on to-night."

To this Mrs. Rutherford deigned no reply.

"And so," she went on, "the day after she arrives, directly my back is turned, she goes off to Cauldstanes to visit him tête-à-tête. This is worse—far worse than I had ever imagined. If I had had any thought of this I would never have consented to have her at Longshaws."

"Then I am glad you had none, my dear," said Mr. Rutherford. "People often get on much better when they do *not* think. That at least has been my experience."

Jimmy's "hundred letters" was a figure of speech. She only wrote one, but it was one in a hundred, and it took her as long and gave her as much trouble as a hundred ordinary letters would have given her.

When it had been written and rewritten about a dozen times, the finished copy ran as follows:

Longshaws, May, 1919.

Dear Arthur: Excuse my calling you this once again. You will be surprised to get a letter from me, but I feel I must write. I behaved very badly to you this afternoon. You will say this is nothing new, but, while I had no excuse before, perhaps, I did have some to-day, and I wish to explain myself. I was so taken by surprise when I found you in the kitchen to-day that I lost my wits completely—I did indeed. And afterwards it would have been awkward to explain to Wintergreen that my not knowing you was all pretense. But I cannot sleep to-night until I have asked you to forgive me—not for the past—I know

you can never do that, but for to-day's offense, which I cannot bear to think of. And—is this too much to ask?—I want your forgiveness to be not in writing but by word of mouth. I shall be here all to-morrow afternoon. If you don't come I shall understand and say no more about it. But you *will* come, won't you—and you *will* forgive me—for to-day's I mean. I ask no more.

JIMMY.

When she had finished and addressed this to Arthur Gardshore, Esquire, care of Dr. Adair, The Bow House, Cauldstanes, she put it into another larger envelope addressed to Wintergreen. Into this she also slipped another note.

"Dear Wintergreen," it ran. "Will you see that Mr. Gardshore gets this as soon as possible? It is an address he wants urgently. Yours sincerely,

JIMMY CARMYLE."

When she had sat some time in contemplation of this envelope, she rose and rang the bell.

Maud appeared.

Maud was Mrs. Rutherford's maid.

"Is there any one who could take this note for me to the Bow House, Cauldstanes?" said Jimmy. "I want it to get there to-night."

"Oh yes, miss," said the girl pleasantly, for she had fallen in love with Jimmy, her hair, her complexion, especially her clothes. "Mrs. Clapperton 's just going. I can ask her to take it in on her way home."

Mrs. Clapperton was a charwoman who had been helping by the day. She was nearly the facsimile and altogether the friend of Mrs. Dick.

"Wintergreen?" she exclaimed when she saw the name on the envelope. "I 'm no' wantin' nae troke wi' her. Wha 's writin' to Wintergreen?"

"Miss Carmyle," said the maid. "And it 's urgent, mind! See that she gets it to-night."

She slipped a shilling into her hand.

"And that 's for your trouble," she added. Then she tripped away again.

The woman, who was already dressed for the road, put the letter into the pocket of her rain-coat.

"Jane Dick would tear me limb frae limb if she thocht I was cairryin' letters to yon woman," she said.

"Why that?" said Susan, the cook, who was always brief and to the point.

"She 's a brazen-faced bizzum—that 's why," said Mrs. Clapperton.

"So 's Jane if ye come to that," replied Susan.

"Jane is what she appears to be onyway," retorted Mrs. Clapperton, and with this mysterious utterance she went out into the night.

Wintergreen was in the act of setting her alarm-clock by the one in the kitchen when she was disturbed by another ring at the bell, and when she answered it she found Mrs. Clapperton stand lowering at her on the door-step.

"Here 's a letter for ye," she said.

"Thank you," said Wintergreen politely, and she held out her hand for the letter.

"No' yet," said the messenger, withholding it; "ye needna think I 'm Jane Dick. I 'll say my say an' no man nor woman—be they what they may—shall hinder me."

"Say on then," said Wintergreen, "but be as quick as you can about it. If you have no work to do to-morrow morning I have, and I 've just been setting my alarm at five o'clock."

"Ay, ye 're very weel pleased wi' yersel', I suppose,"

said Mrs. Clapperton, "comin' in like a wolf in sheep's clothin' amang the workin' weemen, risin' afore them, undersellin' them, daein' as much work as three folk they tell me, takin' the bread oot o' the mooths o' the char-weemen. But there 's mair than me that 's no' as pleased wi' ye as ye are yersel'. Ye may find yersel' some day gettin' drummed oot o' Cauldstanes for yer trouble."

With these words and without waiting for any reply, Mrs. Clapperton took her departure, after flinging the letter down on the door-step in front of its addressee like a challenge.

Quite unperturbed, however, Wintergreen picked it up, and, locking the door, retired once more to the kitchen. Then she opened the outer envelope and read the note.

"When did he ask for this address?" she said to herself when she had finished it.

She remembered that she had never been absent during the interview between her two guests, that she had heard everything they had said to one another from the very first to the very last.

"Address?" she said again. "He asked for no address. Well, anyhow, it 's none of my business."

And it would do to give the letter to him to-morrow, she reflected. Surely it would do to-morrow. She could and would not mount those two flights of stairs again to Gardshore's room. There was a limit to a woman's powers of endurance, and hers, for that day at least, had been already reached.

After she was in bed, however, she kept seeing as in a nightmare the words of the note recording themselves upon the darkness.

"Will you see . . . as soon as possible . . . urgently."

The last word was the worst. It kept repeating itself.

At last in despair she got up, lit a candle, attired herself in a shepherd-tartan dressing gown, gave a shake of adjustment to her four short, thick plaits of hair, and slipped on scarlet bedroom slippers. Thus accoutered she took the note and went downstairs and upstairs till she reached its destination.

There was a light under the door still, and, listening for a moment, she heard footsteps pacing up and down the room within.

They stopped when she knocked.

"Come in," said Gardshore's voice.

"Oh, sir," she said, entering, "why are you not in bed? You promised——"

She stopped, for his face was tragic as when she had first seen it. He wore a dingy gray dressing-gown too, which made him seem more gaunt than ever.

"Don't scold," he said, trying to smile. "I can't bear it to-night. I went to bed. I did really. But sleep I cannot. I am going mad, I think."

"Oh, no, you 're not, sir," said Wintergreen quietly. "Not at least until you have read this note. It 's from Miss Carmyle—about an address you wanted—urgently."

For the life of her she could not help saying this. Her eyes were fixed upon him while she spoke.

"He never heard of that address either," she said to herself.

"Oh, yes, of course," he said nevertheless.

But she saw that he had paled to the very lips.

She gave him the letter, and then, going over to the fire, pretended to mend it while she watched him reading it.

He began it standing, but almost immediately sat down like one who is amazed beyond measure. Gradually as

he read a slow flush mounted in his cheeks, a new light came into his eyes, a smile crept about his lips. Then suddenly—so suddenly and unexpectedly that she was startled out of her wits—"Jimmy!" he exclaimed. It was a cry of ecstatic rapture. Then he passionately kissed the letter.

"I've done it now," said Wintergreen to herself. "He'll never forgive me for seeing this."

But again she was mistaken. Even as her mind misgave her he looked up and saw her standing staring at him on the hearth-rug. Waving the letter wildly he threw back his head and laughed.

"You think me mad now, don't you?" he said. "You must. But it's good to be mad; it's good to be mad!"

Then before she guessed what was going to happen he was dancing round the room, his long dressing-gown flying behind him, a weird figure in his gaunt dishevelment.

Next moment he had come to a standstill in front of her and had seized her by both hands.

"Wintergreen," he exclaimed, "I must tell you."

But drawing her hands away she held them over her ears.

"I want to be told nothing, sir," she said. "You might regret it afterwards and I have no right to know. I am glad if you are glad. Now good night, sir, and go to sleep."

"Sleep!" he exclaimed. "Did you say sleep? Why I feel as though I could dance all night."

"Well, all I ask is; don't dance the ceiling down on my master and mistress below you, sir," she answered.

With these words she left him, went downstairs again, and climbed the other stair to her own room.

"It 's like *Mother Hubbard* and her dog," she said to herself, as she mounted into bed again.

Next morning at breakfast Alice carried out the program that she had laid down for herself with a certain measure of success. She ate largely of rolls and marmalade, and had two cups of the excellent coffee which Wintergreen had prepared. She also remarked that it seemed to have been raining as the pavements outside were rather wet, and later on she opined that it might possibly rain again as the swallows were flying rather low that morning.

Jack, after regarding her each time for a moment in silence, suitably answered each of these remarks, burying himself between times in a newspaper and hurrying away from the table at the first possible moment. As he was about to leave the room, however, Alice called him back.

"If you can spare the motor this afternoon for an hour," she said, "I should like to call at Longshaws on my way to Hillside. You remember there is a tennis-party there to-day. By the way, can you go?"

"No," said Jack shortly, "and I am sorry to say I can't let you have the motor either. Alexander says it won't be ready to go out till to-morrow though he has been working at it all night. I shall have to bike to-day."

"Ah, then I suppose I may have a cab?" she said. "I can't bike in my best dress."

"Oh, certainly, have a cab," he answered with a shrug and then, without farewell, he left her.

It was strange, he reflected, as he pulled on his coat in the hall, unhelped by her hands, unhindered by her caresses, how her simplest words that day had power to anger him, how even the request for the cab had infuri-

ated him. It was as though behind it were an outraged battalion of thoughts and memories of past times, past resolves, past ideals, which seemed all to be toppling together now into dire confusion. He went off disconsolate upon his bicycle, while Alice, triumphant yet with leanness in her soul, sat still in front of her Queen Anne teapot, gazing drearily at her distorted image in it.

She did not go out that morning though she longed to do so. From her new spiritual platform she saw that she had made a fool of herself the day before, that she must at least have made an extraordinary first impression upon her new cook-housekeeper. Instead of being there to instruct her, she had absented herself. When she had returned she had retired to an attic and then gone out again. The new cook-housekeeper probably thought by now that she was an incipient imbecile. The sooner that she effaced this impression the better. She attached herself therefore to Wintergreen and helped her with the bookcases.

This was well, for Wintergreen's helper of the day before had, it seemed, struck work.

"Books?" he exclaimed when she reminded him of his tacit promise. "No—I have done with books! I must go down to the sea again—to the lonely sea and the sky!"

Then off he went and was seen no more till lunch-time.

"Was there ever such a household of erratic beings?" said Wintergreen to herself as she pulled on her working-gloves.

At lunch-time Alice also struck work. The cab was coming for her at two, and she had to dress. It was a very different Alice, as Wintergreen reflected, who came down that day when the cab was announced, to the desperate fugitive of the day before. But the Alice of yes-

terday had been the more lovable of the two. To-day's was rather a hard little person though she looked very smart in a lavender coat-frock and a hat covered with flowers of exactly the same shade.

"It 's my color," she said to herself as she stood once more before her mirror, and it pleased her to see that her eyes were bright and her cheeks pink.

"Being a hollow sham suits me," she added, and pictured herself entering the drawing-room at Longshaws and making a sensation there, patronizing Jimmy, as surely she had a right to do, getting a little of her own back from this odious young woman. Her only regret when she started was that Jack was not to be there to see her deal with this person who had bewitched him. She remembered books in which she had seen similar situations described, and realized that she had been allotted here the part of prima donna. She was Jack's wife. No one could alter that. Thus on her lonely exalted pinnacle a few frosted flowers bloomed in spite of everything.

In the frenzy of composition Jimmy had not taken into account that it might be difficult for her to carry out her part of her own plan. When she had been writing her letter to Gardshore she had been like Alice, superior to mundane things. She had seen only Gardshore in all the world, the man she had loved for years, for whom she had recklessly broken loose from everything when she had read Jack's letter about him at Alimara, for whose sake she had come to Longshaws, and whom, on the first occasion of their meeting, she had, because of sheer nervousness, doubtless again offended mortally.

As she walked home miserably beside Jack through the

clover-fields she had taken some comfort from the thought that, if she were not mistaken, Gardshore had seemed as nervous as herself. But then—was he not a nervous wreck? Jack had told her that in his letter. Not she—not her desertion then—but the war had brought him to his present pass. What had had power to alter her whole existence had probably been for him only a paltry incident long forgotten amid the awful and vital experiences which had since supervened in his life. His love for her had doubtless long ago disappeared in the great maelstrom into which he had been plunged. It was now crushed and dead, or it belonged to some other woman.

This last was the worst. She hated to think of it. Yet she could not think of anything else. All the time she was talking to her two companions at the dinner-table her mind was in a surge of misery. In her desperate uncertainty she decided that her only chance—if she were not to drift away from him for ever—was to seize the advantage which that afternoon had given her, and, slight as it was, immediately make the most of it. Were they to meet again by any chance before she had done this, it would be too late to recover the position she had lost, or to gain anything by it. She had done it therefore. She had sent the note.

Nothing now remained for her to do but to wait for the answer. Upon it would depend everything. Would he write or would he come? Surely, surely he would come. Her whole heart bounded to meet him.

But while it was all very well for her heart to bound to meet him, she found next morning that it would not be so easy to meet him herself. At breakfast Mrs. Ruth-

erford announced that she intended to take her that afternoon to Hillside to play tennis.

"I have told Mrs. Houghton that you are a crack player," she said, "and she has asked several people specially to meet you."

"That 's awfully good of her," said Jimmy ruefully.

"You *are* a crack player, are n't you?" said Mrs. Rutherford sharply.

Jimmy laughed.

"Yes, though I say it as should n't," she said. "But I half thought Mrs. Adair might be here to-day."

"Mrs. Adair will be at Hillside," said Mrs. Rutherford. "You will see her there. My cousins told me she was going."

She pursed up her lips after she had said this, to prevent herself saying anything more. And as there were dozens of things she would like to have said, this self-restraint on her part should be recorded to her credit. But Jimmy only appreciated the fact that to evade the tennis-party would require all the ingenuity she possessed. At the same time she recognized that there might be no need for her to do anything in the matter. A note might come during the morning or a telephone message. She said nothing therefore.

But hour after hour passed and there was no telephone message, and with each hour her hope grew until it became at last a certainty. He was coming himself, and in view of that great event, whoever had been invited to meet her, wild horses, she resolved, should not drag her to any tennis-party. Go to Hillside she would not. She admitted to herself, however, that she must proceed tactfully. At lunch-time, therefore, with considerable effort,

for she had an excellent appetite and there was an extra good lunch, she confined herself to a water-biscuit and complained of an overpowering headache.

Recommended to lie down and take phenacetin, she said that phenacetin never did her any good. Fresh air was the only cure. She would, therefore, if Mrs. Rutherford did n't mind, spend the afternoon in the summer-house in the rose-garden.

Mrs. Rutherford did mind very much. She disapproved of Jimmy in many ways, but she could not deny that she was very effective socially. She would be sure, with her tennis-playing and her clothes, to do her credit at Hillside. Besides people had been asked to meet her. In face of total collapse, however, there is never any good saying anything. Mrs. Rutherford said nothing but "If you want anything tell Maud. Eliza goes out to-day, and that new under-housemaid, Thomasina, is a fool."

Jimmy, therefore, when the motor containing her host and hostess had left the house—early because of calls they had to make on the way to Hillside—told Maud that, ill as she was, if a gentleman from Cauldstanes called to see her she would be at home to him. She would, she added, be found in the rose-garden in the summer-house there. To no one else would she be at home on any account.

Maud replied in her usual satisfactory manner; and even more eagerly than before, for she scented a romance. Certainly; yes, she would see to it.

Jimmy then, confident that Maud would keep her word, took some light literature with her as a stage property, and went out to the summer-house where in a fever of anxiety and suspense and fear and hope she established herself.

Maud meanwhile carried out her orders. As she had a sewing-room to herself and lived aloof from the other servants she did not know that Eliza was going out. She therefore gave Eliza the instructions, and afterwards returned to her own place secure in the belief that Eliza, who was a housemaid well versed in all the finesses of her calling, would carry them out to the satisfaction of all persons. Eliza, being a woman who prided herself on keeping herself to herself, accepted the orders without comment and passed them on to Thomasina. It was on the fool Thomasina, therefore, as so often happens in this world, that, unknown to Maud or to Jimmy, the responsibility finally rested.

But Thomasina was totally unconcerned. She thought nothing of it, and having been left by Eliza to make up pats of butter for tea—to her a major operation—she was far more absorbed in doing that than in anything else when the bell rang.

A cab was at the door and a smart little lady in lavender was standing on the door-step.

"Is Mrs. Rutherford at home?" she asked.

"No, m'm," said Thomasina. "She 's out at a tennis-party at Hillside."

The desire to diffuse as much information as possible, whether she were asked for it or not, was one of her ineradicable characteristics.

"And so 's Mr. Rutherford," she added.

"Then Miss Carmyle will be out too?" said the smart little lady, taking out a smart little card-case.

"Yes, she 's out," said Thomasina, who was always literally truthful. "But only in the summer-house in the rose-garden."

The visitor paused in the act of extracting cards.

"Oh, indeed," she said. "Then can I see her?"

"No, m'm," said Thomasina. "I 'm sorry but ye can't. The orders is that she 'll see no one, m'm, but a gentleman from Cauldstanes."

At this the waiting driver, who was a youth with a sense of humor, emitted an irrepressible snort of mirth and then pretended it was the horse.

"Whoa there—whoa!" he said to that astonished animal, as he with difficulty recovered himself.

His fare, however, was not amused.

"Oh, indeed," she said, frowning as she placed her cards on the tray presented to her. Then turning abruptly she reëntered the cab, which soon had disappeared down the drive again.

Thomasina then returned to her pats of butter and had made perhaps six more when the bell rang again.

A man this time stood on the door-step who had just dismounted from a bicycle which he was still holding, a tall man in gray with a black straw hat. The most noticeable thing about him to an ordinary observer, after his genial, weather-beaten countenance, was the parson's collar which he was wearing. But Thomasina was not an ordinary observer.

"Your mistress in?" said the new-comer pleasantly.

"No, sir," said Thomasina. "She 's gone to a tennis-party at Hillside, and so has Mr. Rutherford. And Miss Carmyle 's out too, jist in the summer-house in the rose-garden. Would ye like to see her?"

The new-comer smiled slightly and hesitated. But, he reflected, he would like to see this young lady very much. He had heard that she was very beautiful, and beauty was not so rife in his world that he should miss any chance of seeing it. Moreover it occurred to him he had heard

that Miss Carmyle sang. For another reason it might be well to take this interview when he could get it.

"Yes, very much," he said. "The question is, would Miss Carmyle care to see me?"

"Are ye from Cauldstanes?" said Thomasina anxiously.

"Yes," was the puzzled reply.

"Ah, then," said Thomasina relieved, "she 'll see ye, sir. No fears."

In her most businesslike manner then she escorted him through the hall, through the shrubbery, and so to the rose-garden.

Jimmy in her summer-house heard their footsteps on the gravel path, Thomasina's voice as she asked for the visitor's name, and the murmur of a man's voice in reply. Half-fainting with all manner of emotions, she was standing at the entrance of the summer-house when Thomasina, emerging from the shrubbery opposite, announced:

"Mr. Pennifeather, miss."

The new under-housemaid's adventures were not yet over. She had only made about four pats more when the door-bell rang again. Another gentleman stood outside holding on to another bicycle. Rather shabby—in old baggy clothes—rather a queer-like gentleman. He spoke queer-like too—very hoarse and thick.

"Is Miss Carmyle——" he began. Then he seemed to lose his breath.

Thomasina did not like the look of him.

"No, sir, I 'm sorry," she said. "She 's not in."

"Not in?" he exclaimed.

"No, sir," said Thomasina.

"But surely," he persisted, "she is in the garden."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Thomasina, who could never tell a lie. "But she 's engaged, sir, with a gentleman from Cauldstanes."

"And did she leave me no message—nothing?" he demanded. "My name is Gardshore. Did she leave no word for me?"

"No, sir, she said no names," said Thomasina. "But if there 's a message I could take it, sir."

"Certainly not," was the answer, "and forget that I called too."

He slipped half a crown into her hand.

"Tell no one I have been here," he said.

"Right, sir," said Thomasina. "I 'm very sorry, sir."

"Silence, girl!" he exclaimed savagely and ungratefully.

Then turning on his heel he remounted his bicycle and in two seconds had disappeared down the drive.

"My!" said Thomasina to herself as she repaired once more to her pats of butter. "I 'm no' surprised she took the other. That 's an awful-like man that."

By the time Thomasina, strong in the consciousness of having discharged with thorough efficiency the duties allotted to her that afternoon, was bearing tea out to the rose-garden where Jimmy, half-frenzied, was still entertaining Mr. Pennifeather, the awful-like man who had been dismissed was once again in his own room, and seated at his writing-desk.

But he was not writing, only sitting at it with his face buried in his hands.

"I must remain sane," he was repeating to himself. "I must remain sane."

Adair's reputation might depend upon it. Already he seemed to be regardless of everything, yet it was incredible that that girl at the door did not know his name. She had been an elaborate liar. Any one could see that. He —Gardshore—had not been the only one who had paid her that afternoon. O dire humiliating thought! Did Jimmy really think that he would wait to take his turn until her new lover had had his? Did she write to Adair too last night? Oh, he could laugh if he had not to weep.

And he who thought the Great Ones had done their worst. Bah! All that they had done before had been mere child's play. Yes; he was doomed to carry out his own plan; to the last detail the ghost-act had to be performed, after all—after last night. Oh, it was damned cruel! . . .

Yet even in these depths he had glimmerings of his old self-detachment. Why was he so angry? he asked himself. How could he expect that she could receive the old love at the same time with the new? And she had meant to be kind. It had made her miserable to see him such an abject wretch. She had wanted to do what she could for him, and her plan had miscarried. Or no—it had succeeded. For now she would no longer worry. She would never know he had come, or that he had ever wanted to come. She had done her part. She would be satisfied.

Miss Pennifeather was the first to arrive home at the manse that evening. She was sitting in her evening-dress reading the "British Weekly" when her brother came in. She prided herself upon the fact that never in her life had she had a love-affair. She had sandy hair and eyebrows, white eyelashes and pale eyes. But as she

made up in usefulness for her lack of personal attractiveness, so she made up in energy for her lack of color. She was forever on the move and keeping others moving. Her name, Patience, was the last that should have been given to her. She had once on a public platform been alluded to as a dynamic power, and, though she never mentioned this, she had never forgotten it. She was devoted to her somewhat dreamy brother, and, though he found her overstimulating at times and likely to go off at tangents in a disconcerting manner at the beck of her own conscience, he was very fond of her.

"I sometimes look at you, Patience, my dear," he said once, "and think what an awful thing it would have been if all that driving force in you which you use for good had been turned instead to evil purposes."

She looked up with eager welcome in her eyes when he came in.

"Well, Patience," he said, "how have you enjoyed yourself?"

"At Hillside? Oh, thoroughly," she said, flinging away her paper. "It was a splendid party. I played three games of bowls with Mr. Apsley against his wife and another man and beat them hollow. Then I went the round of the greenhouses and all the grounds with Miss Meares, and heard all she had to say about her visit to Russia, and last but not least I had a thorough-going, out and out, complete row with Mrs. Rutherford."

"Row?" he interrupted. "But was n't that a pity?"

"Oh, no," said his sister. "We each said all we wanted to say, which otherwise would never have been said at all, and then we tacitly begged each other's pardon. I told her I had had toothache all night, and she said she had been worried out of her life lately. We are more

friendly now than we were before we started. Indeed before we parted we were quite confidential. She told me quite a number of things—but perhaps I had better not tell you——"

"Oh, no, please don't," cried Mr. Pennifeather, waving off all communications with both hands. "Let *me* rather tell *you* something! I have secured a splendid joint-secretary for the fête. She says she does n't know our ways, but I told her that would be an asset. The fact that she is an outsider will make it easier for her to do the work, and the less she knows of our ways the better. She will be able to take us out of old grooves. She is—so far as I can see—exactly the person you want; young, beautiful, gifted, enthusiastic, wealthy probably——"

"James," interrupted Patience, "who, may I ask, *is* this person?"

"Did I not say? How stupid of me," he laughed. "I become more forgetful every day. It is Mr. Rutherford's ward—from Alimara in India—I had tea with her to-day at Longshaws—Miss Carmyle."

For a moment Miss Pennifeather gazed at him in speechless horror. Then—"James!" she exclaimed. "What in the world did you ask *her* for?"

"Because of the reasons I have given," he said, bewildered. "Why should she not be asked?"

"Oh, why did I not insist on telling you before?" cried Miss Pennifeather. "This comes of allowing you to ward off things. You 're always either warding off things or plunging into them. James, James! Why did you take such a step without first consulting me? Do you know why Miss Carmyle came to Longshaws? I had heard rumors of it before, but to-day Mrs. Rutherford told me all about it. She came simply to carry on a flirtation

with the doctor begun in India when he was there. They were the talk of the place at Alimara, and soon here it will be the same."

"My dear Patience, I hope for the credit of the neighborhood that it will not," said Mr. Pennifeather with unwonted heat. "I talked with Miss Carmyle for an hour and a half this afternoon, and I simply refuse to believe that she would do or think anything discreditable. As for the doctor, I have known him for a long time. I know him to be devoted to his wife. I spurn the idea that there is anything unworthy in his friendship with this charming girl, and what 's more, I am convinced that his wife thinks the same as I do."

Patience here gave vent to a little shriek of hysterical laughter.

"Well, it 's to be hoped so," she said. "Do you know who the other joint-secretary is? I fixed it up this afternoon too, and it 's Alice Adair herself. Oh, James, James, you talk of outsiders, but you are an outsider yourself. All your ideas and feelings are from outside—from above—from beyond. You are too good for this earth."

CHAPTER XI

In which Public Business is Transacted

WHEN she reëntered the cab after her encounter with Thomasina at Longshaws, Alice almost ordered it home again. She even knocked on the window with this intention. But the driver did not hear her, and next moment she had changed her mind. Now, if ever, she realized, she must show of what stuff she was made. Was she, because her husband chose to make a fool of himself and go visiting other women under an assumed name—as the gentleman from Cauldstanes—when no one else was to be admitted—was she to go home and wring her hands and weep for him? Never!

She went on, therefore, to Hillside, and, being in a manner out of herself, had never looked so pretty and had never been such a social success as she was that afternoon. Wrath and fear had made her eyes flash and her cheeks glow; wrath at what had happened to her, fear of what might be about to happen. For behind all the fire and fury lurked the consciousness of a cold despair lying in wait for her at the Bow House, which would be hard to meet. The thought of going home terrified her. She stayed, therefore, as long as decency permitted at Hillside, and it was in the last half-hour that Miss Pennifeather came up to her and asked her if she would undertake, along with another person still unknown, the joint-secretaryship of the garden-fête, to be held in aid of the

fund for disabled soldiers and sailors at Pitcaple three weeks from that date.

"We have to rush it, you see, Mrs. Adair," said Miss Pennifeather. "Pitcaple is to be let, and we can't have it after that. Therefore we are having two secretaries. I do hope you will consent to be one of them."

Alice experienced a glow of pride at this. It was the first time since her seclusion that she had been invited to take an official part in any public function. It is well for us sometimes that reasons remain hidden.

"Poor little thing," Miss Pennifeather had just said to Mrs. Rutherford, in that confidential conversation which succeeded the clearing of the air between them. "If all tales are true she will need all the distraction she can get, and if she won't do much good she can't do much harm. She will be sure to work hard at least, and I always prefer—don't you?—a secretary with no initiative."

Alice had consented without hesitation or reservation, but returning in Miss Pennifeather's cab, she began to wonder how Jack would like it, and to realize that in taking this step independently of him she had made a new departure. Never before had she done anything, when Jack was available at all, without telling him first and talking it over with him. This time she would never be able to do this. She had definitely promised. She had now simply to announce what she had done to Jack.

At first this seemed easy enough, but as the cab jolted downhill towards the sea, a cold consciousness of impending disapproval crept upon her. She listened in a daze to her companion's talk, and it occurred to her that it was fortunate that Miss Pennifeather never needed answers.

"So good of you to keep me company, my dear," Miss

Pennifeather was saying. "I had thought of walking home too, but it does take such a time. Not that this old cab of McAllister's takes much less, and, as I always tell him, it invariably smells as if the horse had passed the night in it. But now let 's talk. There is so little time that we must n't lose a minute of it. I 'll send round notes to-night, and call a meeting for to-morrow, at which you and your joint-secretary will be appointed. Then we can get to work."

"Oh, a meeting?" said Alice, feeling like one who has stepped inadvertently upon a raft and been borne away into a rapid.

"Yes, my dear, of course. You could n't be appointed unless," said Miss Pennifeather. "You 'll have to be proposed and seconded. Besides we must have a meeting to draw up a scheme. There are a hundred and one things to do before we can do anything. That sounds Irish, does n't it? But you know what I mean. Of course you 'll bring a notebook and a pencil with you. I shall call a meeting for two o'clock, so that we may have plenty of time, and Miss Fortescue has promised to give us all tea afterwards."

"Miss Fortescue?" exclaimed Alice.

"Yes, had n't I said that Miss Fortescue had kindly consented to have the meeting there?" said Miss Pennifeather. "I think it very good of her. You see the drawing-room at the manse is so small. It would never hold twenty-four people comfortably."

"Twenty-four!" exclaimed Alice. "Are there as many as that?"

"Oh, yes, my dear," said Miss Pennifeather. "You see we must have a large committee drawn from every class in the community; the larger the better. The secret of

good organization is to let every one think he or she is indispensable. The more you expect people to do the more they will do. By the way, could you possibly come round to-night and help me to write these notes?"

When Jack came home half an hour late for supper he found a letter from Alice waiting for him on the mantelpiece.

"Dear Jack," it ran. "There is to be a garden-fête at Pitcaple next month in aid of the Disabled Soldiers and Sailors' Fund. I have been asked to be joint-secretary, and I have consented. I am going now to Miss Pennifeather to help her to write notes. Yours in haste,

"ALICE."

"Mrs. Adair has had supper, sir," added Wintergreen by way of postscript as she set a covered dish upon the table.

Jack made no answer. He was very sore, not so much at Alice's action as at the manner in which she had announced it.

It was the first time she had ever done such a thing.

"And it won't be the last," he reflected bitterly.

He realized the announcement to be a milestone in their lives, a sign of the times, a portent. Well, if she could be independent, so could he. If she wished their ways to part, he would not hinder her. He had his work. He would devote himself to it. A blight had fallen upon their love apparently, but she should at least be proud of him. She should be proud in spite of herself. He would devote himself to his work.

At this juncture in his thoughts the door opened and Gardshore entered.

"Hullo!" said Jack, rising. "This is splendid. I'm glad to see you."

Then he stopped short in mid-flow of speech. There was no answering gladness in Gardshore's tragic eyes.

"Come and sit down," said Jack kindly. "Here, near the fire. Have you had supper?"

He placed a chair and Gardshore sat down.

"Yes—no," he said. "I mean I do not want any. But you go on with yours. I only want to talk to you."

"All right," said Jack, sitting down and repressing a sigh, for he was rather tired. "Talk away."

He went on with his supper then, while Gardshore regarded him gloomily.

"I do wish to heaven," said Jack to himself, "that he would get on or go away."

"I have queer fancies up in my room at times," said Gardshore at last. "I have queer fancies about you, Adair—a—a kind of second sight. To-day—this afternoon—I saw you with a lady."

Jack laughed.

"Which one?" he said. "This afternoon I saw about half a dozen."

"One very beautiful," Gardshore went on, unheeding, "and it was borne in upon me that you were in very great danger, that in being with her you were risking not only your own happiness, but the happiness of one who should be dear to you."

"What in the world is the matter with the man?" thought Jack.

Aloud he said: "Don't worry about it, old chap. Dreams always go by contraries, and so, possibly, do imaginings."

Then looking at him keenly he added: "Don't let that old Wintergreen take advantage of you, you know. It was awfully good of you to help her as you did yesterday, but don't forget you've been long off work and must n't make a too sudden start."

At this, Gardshore, after regarding him for a moment with a sinister expression on his haggard face, rose from his seat.

"But don't go," said Jack as cordially as he could. "Don't go if you are not too tired to stay."

"I am," said Gardshore suddenly and violently; "too tired—too sick—too sorry——"

Then he left the room.

Jack sat motionless, staring at the door, till he heard his patient climb the stair, enter his door, and close it after him with a slam.

His face was troubled as he went on with his meal.

"He's decidedly worse," he said to himself. "I must speak to that old Wintergreen."

He rose and rang the bell.

"Wintergreen," he said when she appeared, "I know you meant well, but I am afraid Mr. Gardshore has been doing too much. I must ask you not to make him work again. He is suffering from nervous strain, and has to be treated with great care. He is decidedly worse to-night."

"I am sorry to hear that, sir," said Wintergreen.

"Has he taken his meals to-day?" said Jack.

"No, sir," said Wintergreen, "at least only very partially."

"Only very partially; I thought so," said Jack. "You see it won't do; this silver-cleaning and so on. He enjoys it at the time, but it's too much. He is suffering from reaction to-night. There must be no more of it."

"Very well, sir," said Wintergreen.

Then she left the room.

But Jack's peace of mind, such as it had been, was gone. At the very moment when he had resolved to win success if he could not have love, this trouble had come to him.

Gardshore had seemed so much better during the last few days. Now he was worse than he had ever seen him; gloomy, wild-looking, morose, incoherent, or at least incomprehensible.

It was damnable.

Could he be going off his head?

The thought took away his appetite. He pushed away his plate and then went upstairs.

Gardshore was seated huddled up in the big chair by the fire.

"You must excuse my following you up," said Jack, "but I wanted to see——"

"To see if I were mad, I suppose?" snarled Gardshore like a surly dog. He looked indeed like some wounded thing sitting glaring there. "Well, be calm," he went on, "I am not mad. Not half so mad, at least, as you are."

Jack took a chair opposite to him.

"I'm afraid I annoyed you just now," he said. "But I should like to hear more of those imaginings of yours if you care to tell me——"

But at this Gardshore leaped up.

"How dare you?" he cried. "How dare you take advantage like this of our position—of our relative posi-

tions—to pretend you do not understand me? If you do not wish me to become a murderer, Adair, I ask you to say no more now, but to go away, and not to return until you can be honest with me. Till then, for God's sake, leave me!"

Crossing the hall a few minutes later Wintergreen met her master looking pale and worried.

"I have to go out and may not get back for an hour," he said. "And I am afraid Mr. Gardshore is not at all well; mentally well, you understand. Don't you go near him, even if he calls. If you want me I can be back in five minutes—I shall be close at hand—two three is the telephone number."

"Yes, sir," said Wintergreen.

But as soon as he had gone she went upstairs to the top landing and knocked at Gardshore's door.

"Come in," said Gardshore irritably.

She entered and found him huddled as before.

"Don't ask me to have supper," he barked, before she had said a word. "I don't wan't anything at all to-night, and it is n't a bit of use saying I 'll get run down. I want to run down. The sooner I run down the better."

"Very well, sir," said Wintergreen. "Then I 'll just make up your fire for you."

"You shall not!" he exclaimed, starting up. "You shall not touch the fire! How dare you make game of me? But you all do! He did too. But he need n't think he deceived me. Tell him that from me. He did not deceive me with his ridiculous professional jargon."

"Good night then, sir. I 'll go away," said Wintergreen.

"And don't come back, whatever you do," he answered.

Alice was asleep or apparently so when Jack returned that night, and next morning she had gone downstairs before he awoke. They met at breakfast for the first time since Alice's communication of the evening before.

She had expected some adverse comment from him, but none came. He was buried for the most part, as on the day before, in his newspaper. And somehow this indifference seemed to her the worst thing that had happened yet. It made her feel, as nothing had done, the extent of the rift that had come between them.

He left her, as on the day before, immediately he had finished breakfast, and went up to Gardshore's flat, where he found a notice fastened on the door.

"It is requested that no one, with the exception of Wintergreen, he allowed to enter here to-day.—GARDSHORE."

"This is awful," said Jack to himself. "I can't ask that woman to go into a madman's room. Whatever should I do?"

He went down nevertheless to the kitchen where Wintergreen was at her morning duties. Her arms were plunged to the elbows in a pail of soap-suds as she listened to him.

"Wintergreen," he said, "have you seen the notice on Mr. Gardshore's door?"

"Yes, sir," she said. "I saw it when I took up his breakfast."

"You took up his breakfast!" he exclaimed. "But I told you——"

"Yes, sir. I beg your pardon," she said. "But I forgot till I got there, and then, seeing the notice on the door, I thought it would be all right, sir."

"Well, thank God! *You* have good nerves at any rate," said Jack.

"Yes, thank God, sir," said Wintergreen. "And I have had rare chances of toughening them up too. The best of nerves need toughening up to be of any real use, sir."

He laughed, looking at her for the first time with an interest that was not hostile or suspicious.

"Then I wish you would toughen up Gardshore's," he said. "They badly need it, and he seems to have changed his doctor."

Alice heard their voices in the distance from where she sat in the dining-room, pretending to read the paper and wondering if Jack would really go out without saying a word to her about her announcement, without seeing her again. She wished now that she had never seen or heard of Miss Pennifeather or the fête or the secretaryship. The little pride she had felt in it was turned to dust and ashes. Then suddenly it occurred to her that it was not too late to back out. She had not yet been formally elected. She could write a note.

Hardly had she thought of it before she was at her desk.

"Dear Miss Pennifeather," she wrote. "I am very sorry to trouble you again, but I have been thinking things over and have come to the conclusion that I should not undertake the secretaryship for the fête. I am not businesslike and have had no experience of such work. I feel sure that you would have no difficulty in finding a much better secretary. If I can help you in

any other way I shall be glad to do so. Thanking you for asking me, and hoping you will forgive me for being so changeable and troublesome, Yours sincerely,

"Alice Adair."

But this letter was destined never to be read by any one but its writer.

Alice was in the act of signing her name when the door-bell rang, and two minutes later the front door opened. It seemed as though a gust of wind had come in. There was a sound of voluble talking, the rattle of an umbrella in the stand, the swish of a mackintosh as it missed the table and fell on the floor, then the tramp of heavy boots approaching the dining-room door.

Then the door opened.

"Miss Pennifeather," announced Wintergreen.

This lady, as she told Mrs. Rutherford afterwards, had not slept a wink all night. She had been worried enough the night before when she first heard that her brother had asked the notorious Miss Carmyle to be joint-secretary with the one woman in Cauldstanes with whom she should not have been asked to act. But as as the hours passed she had felt worse and worse, until at last as morning broke she had made up her mind that something must be done at once. What that should be seemed to her perfectly clear. Miss Carmyle was an unknown quantity. She did not know her, but her brother had said she might be a very great asset to the committee. Mrs. Adair, on the other hand, she knew or thought she knew. It would be easy, she imagined, to eliminate Mrs. Adair. She could give her something else perhaps to make up for the secretaryship. She put on her hat,

therefore, after breakfast to run round and see Mrs. Adair, though she was in the midst of helping Phemie the treasure with the housework.

"Just go on with cutting up those things, Phemie," she said. "I shall be back in ten minutes."

And she was really under the impression that ten minutes would suffice.

Three-quarters of an hour later she reëntered the manse and made straight for the study where her brother was sitting reading.

"James," she said, "will you kindly advise me what to do? I think I have a right to ask, as it was you who got me into this predicament."

"My dear Patience," said her brother, "I shall be delighted to give you advice."

"Whether you will take it or not is another matter," he might have added.

"Well, then," said Miss Pennifeather, "I felt that it would be impossible to have those two women publicly associated together. I know what you think, James, but we 're not all saints; and I made up my mind that I would get Mrs. Adair to withdraw."

"My dear Patience," said her brother. "Get her to withdraw? How very unpleasant!"

"Oh, yes, I know," said his sister, "but one had to do something, and somehow I thought Mrs. Adair would be quite easy to manage. She was so modest about it yesterday afternoon, and after all she is such an incompetent little chit. But it 's always those people who are utterly incapable who insist upon forcing themselves into things."

"But, Patience," said Mr. Pennifeather, sitting up in his chair, "are you not very unreasonable, my dear? If

you thought Mrs. Adair so incompetent why in the world did you ask her to be your seceretary?"

"Oh, well," said Patience, shrugging her shoulders, "I had my reasons, James. But that is not the point. The point is that nothing will induce her to withdraw."

"And did you tell her who her colleague was to be?" said Mr. Pennifeather.

"Yes, I began by that," said his sister. "I started straight off with that."

"There now," said Mr. Pennifeather. "What did I tell you? Did n't I say that Jack Adair's wife would think the same as I did? Now I hope you are convinced that the absurd rumors you have heard are without foundation?"

"No, James," said Miss Pennifeather. "No, James, I am not convinced. There was something in her manner —I am inclined to think that this is a case of refusal to give ground before an enemy."

"Really, Patience," said her brother, "your whole point of view in this matter is wrong. You can only see one side of the question because——"

"Very well, James," said his sister rapidly. "To save time I agree. But what would you advise now?"

"Ask Miss Carmyle to withdraw," said her brother jocosely. "I do wish you would. It would interest me to see what she did."

"Then, James," said Miss Pennifeather, "I may as well tell you that I went straight from the Bow House and telephoned to Mrs. Rutherford."

Mr. Pennifeather emitted an exclamation of dismay and cast his book down on the writing-table.

"Patience—you did n't?" he cried.

"I did," said Patience, "and I told Mrs. Rutherford

what had happened, and asked her advice as to what should be done now. Of course I expected her to suggest speaking to Miss Carmyle, and so she did. She said she would go straight and speak to her."

Mr. Pennifeather groaned.

"And what I want to know now," said his sister, taking no notice of his distress, "is whether you think it likely that Miss Carmyle will withdraw?"

"Very likely indeed," said Mr. Pennifeather. "I could hardly get her consent to act."

"In that case," said his sister, "don't you think I had better ask——"

"Ask no one," he exclaimed, "or you may end in having three secretaries!"

Jimmy's headache of the day before had quite gone by dinner-time, and all the evening she seemed to be experiencing a reaction from it. Never had she been more gay, more exquisitely dressed, more fascinating than on the night following the fiasco in the rose-garden. As soon as Mr. Pennifeather had left she had gone straight to her room, and, ringing for Maud, had asked her to find out if any one else had called while Mr. Pennifeather was there. Maud went and asked Eliza, and Eliza, who was a labor-saver, as Thomasina was out of the way, confined herself to looking to see if there were any new cards.

"Only Mrs. Adair," she said.

Maud communicated this news with sympathy in her kind eyes. Had the gentleman from Cauldstanes not come? She too had had her experiences. She took extra trouble that night with the beautiful bronze hair.

But the sympathy, of which Jimmy was unwillingly

aware, instead of doing her good, simply roused the devil in her. Never, as Mrs. Rutherford said afterwards, had she been so impossible as on that occasion. They had people to dinner, and the meal began with descriptions and imitations by her of people she had met on the voyage home, which made the whole party, except Mrs. Rutherford and her friend, Miss Scoresby, rock in their chairs with merriment. From this she went on to tales of various kinds, which set the table in a roar at intervals, and afterwards at dessert proceeded to palmistry, which necessitated her holding the hands of all the men. After this came songs of all descriptions and, after them, step-dances. It was the most awful dinner-party over which Mrs. Rutherford had ever presided.

She and Miss Scoresby retired early in the evening to a little inner drawing-room and, sitting down, looked at each other in silence. Then they shook their heads and, having thus dismissed Jimmy for the time, they began to discuss more important matters.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Rutherford, "though this is not official of course, you, in my opinion, are the right person to be the other secretary. Mrs. Adair requires some one to direct her. She will do very well under your capable guidance."

"Oh, do you think so?" said Miss Scoresby, highly pleased.

"My dear, every one thinks so," said Mrs. Rutherford. "We all remember how splendidly you managed the Red Cross whist-drive and the jumble sale. There are no two opinions about it, I assure you."

"Yet," said Miss Scoresby, "does it not seem strange that Miss Pennifeather has not approached me yet?"

"It *is* strange," said Mrs. Rutherford. "She quite

intended writing to you immediately after she got home."

"There will be a letter awaiting me doubtless when I get back," said Miss Scoresby. "What are they doing now?"

She was beginning to feel out of it in the inner drawing-room with Mrs. Rutherford, and now that she had heard her opinion about the secretaryship she was also beginning to feel rather bored. Moreover a sudden silence which had succeeded the noise in the outer room was rather arresting.

"Do let 's go and see," she said after a moment.

As she spoke some one began playing softly and tentatively a minuet.

"Oh, I know that," came Jimmy's voice. "It 's 'Marquise,' by Massanet. A delicious thing. Jack Adair and I danced it once at Alimara at a concert.

"Dance it now," exclaimed half a dozen voices.

"I don't believe I could," said Jimmy, "without Jack."

"Let 's ring him up!" said some one.

"Oh, nonsense," came Mr. Rutherford's voice. "I can dance a minuet as well as Jack any day. Come along, Jimmy. Play up, Miss Apsley, please."

Amid dead silence the minuet music began again. Then Ada Apsley, who had a lovely mezzo voice, began to sing.

Vous en souvenez vous Marquise—Marquise—Marquise—?
Vous portiez une robe exquise
De blanc satin
Et l'archet mariant nos âmes
La main dans la main nous dansâmes
Jusqu'au matin. . . .

At the first word Miss Scoresby had made for the door into the other drawing-room and now stood looking on.

"Oh, my dear, you must come," she exclaimed presently in a stage whisper, beckoning to her companion.

Her tone was compelling. Mrs. Rutherford rose and came forward to the doorway.

"Charles!" she exclaimed faintly when she looked within. But he was far beyond noticing her, and so was everybody else. The rugs had been kicked aside, and, in the middle of the polished floor, Charles—a new, courtly, graceful Charles for all his stout middle age—was gravely bowing and circling with the sylphlike Jimmy.

"I say, does n't the old boy do it rippingly?" she heard one young man in front of her say to another. "I did n't know he had it in him."

"Any one would do it rippingly with such a partner," said the other.

"All the same I should like to see Adair do it with her—what?"

"Yes, I hear he is rather gone in that quarter—was meeting her at Brakely when she arrived and so on."

"Rather rough on his wife; a pretty little girl. I met her at Hillside this afternoon."

"Ah, yes, pretty enough; but not in the same street as this one," said the other.

There was a moment's silence, and still the dance went on.

Moi j'en ai toujours
Gardé la memoire
De vos petits pieds,
Vos souliers d'ivoire,
D'un sillon de lis dessinant vos pas.
Et vous de danser ne vous lassant pas.
De ce menuet vous fûtes la gloire—
Immortels regrets d'un passé lointain . . .

"Old Charlie 's quite carried away," said one of the men to the other again. "After all, it 's rotten luck for a man who can dance like that to be old and married to——"

A violent kick from his companion, who had just discovered his hostess' proximity, silenced him.

At the same moment a long sustained high note and a sweeping obeisance brought the dance to an end.

It was the climax of the evening.

"We don't want anything more after that," said some one.

And presently the company dispersed. Jimmy also disappeared, and when Mrs. Rutherford came to look for her husband an hour later she found him alone in the smoking-room, dreaming over an unlighted cigar.

"Well, Charles," she said sharply. I hope you are pleased with yourself, acting the mountebank in your own drawing-room. Though you probably did not notice it, Eliza came in while you were curvetting about, to announce the Scoresby's carriage. You 'll be the talk of the servant's hall."

"Shall I?" exclaimed Charles. "Do you really think so, Sarah? Well! I thought I had done with being talked about! I owe Jimmy thanks for that."

"I wish the girl was gone," exclaimed Mrs. Rutherford. "Either she or I will have to leave Longshaws soon."

And with these words, without waiting for an answer, which was perhaps wise, Mrs. Rutherford left the room.

Meantime Jimmy, whom every one, including Maud, believed to be in bed and asleep, was roaming like a wild thing about the grounds, a prey to the violence of disappointment. Wounded pride added its sting to her de-

spair. Never before had she so humbled herself to any man as to write and virtually ask for an interview. It had always been the other way with her. And no answer of any kind had come to her. He had taken absolutely no notice. She would never get over it, she told herself. She was the most miserable girl under the moon. And what to do now? Would it not be better to go away from Cauldstanes and be done with it? What good would it do to stay on as though she were hoping for future meetings? Surely she had already been humiliated enough. She clenched her hands as she thought of her letter, of how she had written and rewritten it a dozen times, only to have it thrown into the fire most likely.

One hope only remained. It came to her suddenly as she stood on the lawn close to the French window of the morning-room by which she had emerged from the house. Had her letter been delivered? Was it possible that by any chance it had never arrived? Messengers were careless sometimes. The thought grew and grew until it became a possession. She felt that at all risks she must find out. She could not wait either. She would telephone that very night. It would be safer now than in the day. The telephone was in the morning-room, far from all the bedrooms of the house. She reëntered it by the French window and, closing the door carefully, took up the receiver and asked for the Bow House. There was a long pause before there was any answer, so long that she rang again.

"There 's no reply from the Bow House," said a voice. But almost immediately afterwards a woman's voice answered.

"Hullo!" said Jimmy. "Is that you Wintergreen?"

"Yes."

"This is Jimmy Carmyle."

"Yes."

"I 'm sorry to bring you down out of bed," said Jimmy, "but it was urgent. I had to know to-night. Did you get the letter I sent you yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Did you deliver the enclosure to Mr. Gardshore?"

"Yes."

"I have had no reply," said Jimmy, and for the life of her she could not keep the half-sob out of her voice. "That 's why I wondered; but if the letter was delivered that 's all I want to know. Thank you, Wintergreen. Good night."

"Good night," said Wintergreen.

As Jimmy laid down the receiver again the clock in the hall struck three and, remembering that pride prevented her allowing the ravages of grief to appear, she forced herself to go to bed, where presently from sheer exhaustion she fell asleep. But about eight o'clock she woke again and lay wondering how, without remark and without offense to her kind host, she could manage to leave Longshaws at once. Amid all these agitations Mr. Pennifeather's visit and his request were of course forgotten. She and her hostess were sitting alone at breakfast when Eliza came in to say that Mrs. Rutherford was wanted at the telephone. She was gone for some time, and when she returned there was a strange expression on her face.

"I am surprised to hear from Miss Pennifeather," she said, "that you have been asked to be joint-secretary for the fête, and that you have accepted."

Even the saying of these words made Mrs. Rutherford furiously indignant. Miss Scoresby would be so dread-

fully disappointed. Besides, this awful girl accepting an invitation—and *such* an invitation—without consulting her! It was too much. Jimmy in fact would have realized this herself had she not been frenzied at the time, and subsequently oblivious.

"Oh, yes, so I did," she said. "I had quite forgotten."

This was insult added to injury.

"Of course it's very kind of you and all that," said Mrs. Rutherford. "But do you think you are fitted for such a task?"

Here Mrs. Rutherford by excess of eagerness thwarted her own intention. Her tone roused the devil in Jimmy again.

"For some reason she wants me to back out," she said to herself.

"Fitted?" she said aloud. "Oh, yes. I have always been extremely good at getting up entertainments."

Mrs. Rutherford at this grew first hot, then cold. The scene of the night before recurred to her mind. She saw Charles, her husband, laird of Longshaws, dancing minuets at Pitcaple before the whole neighborhood. She became suddenly desperate.

"I think you ought to know," she said, "that the other joint-secretary is Mrs. Adair."

"I am delighted to hear that," said Jimmy heartily as she helped herself to jam. "I have not seen her yet, but I am sure we shall get along excellently."

At about a quarter to two Miss Pennifeather met Mrs. Rutherford in the hall of the Fortescues' house. A buzz of voices could already be heard upstairs, and a pile of umbrellas lay on the hall table. But here there was still a moment's solitude.

"Well?" said Miss Pennifeather anxiously.

"I am sorry to tell you," said Mrs. Rutherford, "that my interview with Miss Carmyle has been quite useless, and yet I tried everything I could think of. I was even explicit. But nothing had any effect."

"Well, at any rate," said Miss Pennifeather, whose rapidly working mind was wont to adjust itself with startling velocity, "they both know now, and that is something."

"But what a combination," exclaimed Mrs. Rutherford; "a woman of no experience and a harebrain with too much! I cannot imagine what your brother was thinking of! Now Miss Scoresby——"

"Oh, Miss Scoresby would never have done," said Miss Pennifeather. "She acts on the principle that if you never do anything you will never make mistakes. But what is the good of a woman on a committee who never will commit herself? We don't want that for a fête. We want go and push. And that we have ourselves—you and I, Mrs. Rutherford."

"Well, all I can say," said Mrs. Rutherford, "is that I hope we shall be able to manage our committee better than we have been able to manage our two secretaries-elect."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Pennifeather, "but we must get on now."

She then led the way upstairs.

At the drawing-room door they were met by Lydia, who led them to greet Clara, ensconced as a spectator in a corner.

A ripple of laughter went through the company as they came in. Jimmy, very graceful and chic in beautifully cut gray garments was giving an account of the last committee meeting she had been at in India, after

which they had all posed in the heat of the day for a photograph, only to find afterwards that an elephant had, by mistake, been photographed before on the same plate. Even Alice could not help laughing, though she had been stiffly grave up till then, and, as the whole performance was for her benefit, Jimmy was gratified at this.

"Let her alone and she 'll come home," she said to herself.

Alice indeed was relieved that she could sit in the same room with Jimmy and not betray embarrassment. So long as Jimmy kept all eyes on herself Alice felt at ease and able to cope with everything. With her pencil and note-book too, she felt quite important.

But all at once a rustling silence fell.

Miss Pennifeather had taken the chair.

In a few moments, with characteristic swiftness, she had passed through the preliminaries.

"And now," she went on, "we must proceed to the election of two joint-secretaries. Two ladies have been approached; Miss Carmyle and Mrs. Adair."

At this point a large lady in the fourth row rose to a point of order.

"Miss Pennifeather and ladies," she said, "I desire to protest against the private approaching of two ladies with regard to the secretaryship. I have attended committee meetings for years, and I know that this is not the correct procedure."

Here she ceased and sat down amid considerable sensation.

"I agree with Mrs. Moncur," said another lady, rising. "In my humble opinion the lady in the chair—if she can spare the time—should call for nominations."

"Very well, very well!" said Miss Pennifeather hurriedly. "I *do* call for nominations."

"I beg to propose Miss Scoresby," said Mrs. Moncur, rising massively and deliberately. "Miss Scoresby is one in whom we can all have the utmost confidence. She does not allow herself to be hurried or flurried into anything which she considers injudicious. She has a mind of her own, and knows the ways of this place, and though she is not one who thrusts herself forward in any way, as some people do who are much less worthy of prominence, she is a born leader. I therefore have much pleasure in proposing Miss Scoresby."

"Is that seconded?" said Miss Pennifeather, looking rather warm.

"I beg," said the second lady who had risen before, "very cordially to second the proposal of Mrs. Moncur. I do so with confidence, because I feel that in Miss Scoresby we have one whom we all know. As Mrs. Moncur has well put it, she, Miss Scoresby, knows the ways of the place, and this in an entertainment which is to be of a local character is exceedingly important. She also, as Mrs. Moncur has said, is of an independent nature, and able to hold her own against any woman. I have therefore the greatest pleasure in seconding Mrs. Moncur's proposals."

"Any more nominations?" said Miss Pennifeather, flustered but determined to get on at all costs. "Miss Scoresby's name has been proposed and seconded. Any others?"

"I beg to propose Miss Carmyle," said Ada Apsley, starting up. "She is accustomed to committee meetings as we have just heard."

Here there was another ripple of laughter.

"And I beg to submit, with all deference to the other speakers, that a little breath from the outside world will do us all good."

Ada sat down amid applause, and three people started up to second her.

"Miss Carmyle is proposed and seconded," said Miss Pennifeather. "Any other nominations?"

"I beg to propose Mrs. Adair," said Jimmy, rising. "I refuse to act without Mrs. Adair."

"Is this seconded?" said Miss Pennifeather faintly.

At least it sounded faint to Alice through the rushing and buzzing in her ears. It seemed to her, sitting there with her note-book and pencil, as though she had deliberately been made a fool of before all those people. They too, like Jack, had rejected her for the woman in gray, and had left it to the intruder she so bitterly hated to propose her. Surely this last humiliation was the greatest affront that could have been offered to her. Only determination that no one should see she minded, no one dare to pity her, kept her in her place. She did not even hear the proposal seconded. When she came to herself Miss Pennifeather had progressed a stage further.

"Three names are before the meeting," she was saying, "the names of Miss Scoresby, Miss Carmyle, and Mrs. Adair. Will those in favor of Miss Scoresby please hold up their hands?"

"Stop!" said suddenly a voice from the back row, and five hands, which had risen, fell again. "Pardon me, Miss Chairman, if I remind you that you have omitted one point and that rather an important one, namely, the question whether all those ladies mentioned, if elected, will accept office."

"My dear Miss Scoresby," exclaimed Miss Penni-

feather, "surely their willingness to allow themselves to be nominated and seconded implies that they are willing to accept office."

"I am sorry to disagree with the chair," said Miss Scoresby, "but for my part nothing will induce me to take the post of secretary. Let those who were thought worthy of preliminary approach suffice. I beg that my name be withdrawn from the list of nominees."

"And do you mean to tell me, Miss Scoresby," exclaimed Miss Pennifeather in a towering passion, "that you have come here to-day and allowed the time of this meeting to be wasted, simply to tell us, at the end of all the delay which you have caused, that you have changed your mind? Then allow me to tell you, Miss Scoresby, that I am glad—extremely glad—that you are not to be our secretary, for any one who could be not only so unbusinesslike but so obstructive is unfit for any post whatever."

"Miss Pennifeather," said Miss Scoresby, rising, "I am convinced that you in my place would now leave the meeting. But being a Christian I have no intention of doing so. I forgive you, Miss Pennifeather."

She sat down amid applause from Mrs. Moncur and her seconder.

Again there was a general buzz, and Miss Pennifeather had begun to look apoplectic when Jimmy rose once more.

"Miss Pennifeather and ladies," she said, and there was silence. "Since Miss Scoresby has withdrawn her name, there can now be no difficulty. Mrs. Adair and I thank you for the honor you have done us in electing us your joint-secretaries, and in accepting office we demand that you now proceed to the next business."

CHAPTER XII

In which Thomasina does some Thickening

WHILE these things were going on in the Fortescues' drawing-room, and Miss Clara in her corner was having another field-day, Miss Lydia in the kitchen was bearing the brunt as usual. Clara had ordered tea for twenty-four, and then handed the matter over to her sister. Lydia, during the first part of the meeting, therefore, was still in the throes of preparation. Though she was a member of the committee she had heard none of the opening speeches. Her whole attention at that time had been occupied in looking after the servants, more especially Thomasina, whom Mrs. Rutherford, because the Fortescues' cook was on holiday, had brought with her from Longshaws.

"I am sorry I could not bring Eliza," she had said, "but to tell you the truth I dare not ask her. She is such a self-contained woman, one never knows what she may answer. So I have just brought Thomasina, but you will have to watch her with the china."

Lydia had had to set the tea herself so that Thomasina might not handle the Rockingham cups and saucers. And after the dining-room was ready she left it in charge of Davina, her own maid, with strict injunctions not to allow Thomasina to approach it. Then she went upstairs.

When she arrived the meeting was in full swing. Jimmy was seated at a little table strenuously taking notes.

Alice, beside her, outwardly calm but inwardly in a fume, was handing her now a pencil, now an india-rubber. Lydia settled down at last to enjoy herself.

Not five minutes after she had left the kitchen Davina looked up from the jumper she was knitting for herself.

"Eh," she said, "I 've forgot the milk. Ye micht fill up yon jugs in the pantry, Thomasina!"

"Right," said Thomasina, who was always obliging. She retired to the pantry. "Is this all there is?" she called presently.

"Every drop," said Davina. "There was some to come from Longshaws, but Mrs. Rutherford forgot. They 're terrible short in Cauldstanes, but we can fill up wi' watter if it 's no' enough. They 'll a' be sae thrang speakin' that they 'll never ken. It 's no' like a tea whaur there 's naething else to dae but look at what they 're gettin'. Fill the jugs jist half."

"Right," said Thomasina once more. But almost immediately afterwards a suppressed scream and a crash of crockery came simultaneously from the pantry. These sounds were followed by a gurgling noise.

"Eh, my guid black dress!" wailed Thomasina.

Flinging down her jumper, Davina rushed into the pantry.

"In a' the airth!" she exclaimed. "Hooever did ye dae that?"

A big jug lay on its side with two small jugs smashed beneath it. Milk lay in pools on the floor, in splashes on Thomasina, on the wall, everywhere, except where it should have been.

"Ye goat!" exclaimed Davina, wringing her hands.

"It was my cuffs," half sobbed Thomasina. "Thae

cuffs 'll be my death yet. I broke a decanter last nicht wi' them. But I 'll rin oot an' get mair," she added distractedly.

"Mair?" exclaimed Davina. "There 's nae mair in Cauldstanes till six o'clock. They 're terrible short the noo, an' the dairy 's closed till six. Stop though," she added, "I 'll tell ye whaur ye could get some maybe. Jist across the road at the Bow Hoose. Wintergreen micht be able to gi'e us some. Mrs. Adair 's a great friend o' the Miss Fortescues. Rin—quick—for a' ye 're worth!"

As she spoke she began scooping up all the milk she could from the floor with a table spoon.

"What the e'e doesna see the hert disna scunner at," she said to herself while Thomasina ran as for her life.

Gardshore had that morning tendered an apology to Wintergreen for what he called his disgusting behavior of the night before. He had slept since for a few hours, and had risen sufficiently refreshed to wish at least to make the attempt to be his lighter self. But to Wintergreen this phase seemed more tragic than any that had preceded it. She was wae for him in that gentle propitiatory mood. When Jack and Alice had left the house he came down and asked if he could help by way of compensation for what had passed.

"That depends upon what you call helping," she said. "All the work is done, but I like to see you there. It will soothe and amuse me when I am at my hateful mending. Sit down there in that chair and have a sleep."

He laughed.

"You are a wonderful woman," he said. "To sit there

and sleep was exactly what I wanted. I have so often envied dogs on hearth-rugs, curled up and comfortable, and not obliged to converse."

"Curl up and be comfortable then," said Wintergreen, examining a table-cloth in which were several holes. "And be glad you were never taught to do this dull work," she added.

He laughed again, and, sitting down opposite to her, closed his eyes and soon was in the land of dreams.

"He's tired out," said Wintergreen to herself; "too tired even to think. He's having a little respite from whatever it is."

But whatever was it? As her needle and thread went in and out mending the linen according to its own pattern her mind worked also at a task of reconstruction; upon something more difficult than any pattern that was ever woven. What had happened to change this man now lying there in a sleep so like death that it made her eery to look at him? What had happened to change him from a being half mad with joy to a being half mad with grief in the space of twenty-four hours? As the fire crackled and the clock ticked she recapitulated in her mind as much as she knew of the events of the day before.

In the morning he had not worked. He had repudiated his promise to help her with the bookcases. He had cast everything to the winds and had gone out, down to the sea—to the lonely sea and the sky. He had still been happy, not with the wild rapture of the night before, but with something perhaps more deep, more far-reaching. He had settled down to some joyous expectation of some good in the near future. He had come in at lunch-time radiant for him, and had eaten an excellent meal. After that—here was the blank—what had hap-

pened to him? She had supposed him to be going again to the shore. She had asked him if he would be back for tea, and he had said: "No—a thousand times no."

She had wondered at the time what this meant exactly. But according to her custom she had made no comment. There had been in him at that moment an inner glow apparent. He had still had hope with him, a sense of joyous anticipation when he had left the house.

But when she had been sitting at tea he had returned, and said quietly that he wanted nothing but to be left alone. He had gone up to his room and had remained there until supper-time. Afterwards had come the fury, and then the collapse.

It had been between two and four o'clock then that the catastrophe had happened.

That there had been catastrophe was certain. The joy had been effaced by grief. Had the cause of the joy then been removed? Or had the same cause served for both, so that what had caused the joy now caused the grief?

Here, fortunately, a bell rang, and forced her to give her brain a rest. When it returned to the problem it was clearer, and at once decided that the cause of the whole thing had been the letter from the girl called Jimmy.

But that in itself was the most puzzling thing of all. In the afternoon the two had met as strangers. Yet in the evening he had received her letter as a lover—as a passionate lover. Had they not been so aloof, so strange, so uninteresting, as they had appeared to be at her unfortunate tea-party? The more she thought of things the more curious they became. She thought of Jimmy at Brakely, in the train, as she had last seen her, and lastly

of Jimmy as she had spoken in the night with that strange break in her voice that had sounded like a sob.

"I had to know to-night," she had said.

She had had to know whether that letter had been delivered. What had been in that letter?

"I was a fool not to let him tell me," she said to herself. "It might have saved a lot of bother."

Well, it was too late now. But if she could only fill that gap in the history of the day before, find out what he had done between two and four, the mystery might be solved. Her mind worked round and round. She finished one table-cloth and had begun another when, to her surprise and annoyance, she heard some one entering the house—some one breathing hard and coming at full speed. With chagrin she remembered that she had left the door ajar.

Then suddenly a loud knock resounded on the kitchen door.

She sprang up to stop the intruder, but it was too late.

Without waiting for an answer to her knock, Thomasina almost fell into the kitchen.

"Hush!" exclaimed Wintergreen softly but with vehemence. "There is some one asleep. Say what you have to say quietly."

"Oh," exclaimed Thomasina in a breathless voice. "It 's the gentleman——"

Then she stood staring at Gardshore as though transfixed.

"Go on with your message, girl," said Wintergreen sternly. "You want milk in a hurry. Is that it?"

"How did ye know?" exclaimed Thomasina, round-eyed.

"By the amount on your apron and your dress," re-

turned Wintergreen. "Well, by good luck I can give you some. Can you manage to carry it safely back?"

But Thomasina still stood staring as though rooted to the spot.

"You cannot know this gentleman," said Wintergreen sharply. "You must be mistaking him for some one else. Where could you have seen him, and when?"

The reply was unexpected.

"I saw him yesterday at Longshaws," said Thomasina.

"What?" exclaimed Wintergreen.

"Yesterday at Longshaws," said Thomasina again.

Then suddenly recollecting herself—"Eh, mercy, I forgot!" she exclaimed. "He gave me half a crown not to tell he was there."

"Then you 'd better go before he wakes," said Wintergreen, repressing a smile. "And—here—give me that milk. I want to see it safe home."

She did not only that, but she saw it poured into all the small jugs that were left unbroken and set on the trays allotted to them. But by the time the committee rose she was back in her kitchen again and had resumed her reconstructing.

And now the gap between the events of the day before had been filled. Thomasina had left more behind her than she had taken with her; more too than she had had any right to leave, as she very soon realized to her own dismay. Tea was not over before she had recollected that she had not so much as asked Wintergreen to keep her secret. When that man woke Wintergreen might tell him everything, with who knew what woeful consequences. It was impossible to go home to Longshaws with such dreadful possibilities hanging over her.

Wintergreen was interrupted, therefore, in the midst

of washing up after tea by the bell ringing again, and there was Thomasina.

"Oh, I came please," she said breathlessly, "to ask ye to say nothing about what I said about—about the gentleman."

"My girl," said Wintergreen, "I am not in the habit of repeating things."

"Oh, but ye never know," said Thomasina, "and I thought it would ease my mind if I jist asked."

"You were told not to tell then?" said Wintergreen. "But since you have told me so much you may as well tell me the rest. Half-confidences lead to endless confusion. Why did the gentleman tell you not to announce him?"

"Well, ye see," said Thomasina, "he couldna be announced when he cam' for the gentleman from Cauldstanes was in, an' the orders was that Miss Carmyle was no' to be at home to anybody else when he was there."

"Oh, it was Miss Carmyle who was at home, was it?" said Wintergreen.

"Yes," said Thomasina, "the others was out at a party at Hillside."

"Oh, yes," said Wintergreen. "And the gentleman from Cauldstanes had come——"

"Yes," said Thomasina.

"You don't know his name, I suppose?" said Wintergreen.

"No," said Thomasina. "I canna mind it. I never could mind names. But he was a fine big gentleman in gray tweeds, an' ridin' a bike, an' wi' a real kind, jolly face on him."

Wintergreen's own face grew grave at this descrip-

tion. Jack, she remembered, had been riding a "bike" that day.

"Well, you had better be getting along now," she said to Thomasina. "You shall come to no harm by telling your secret to me. But you may not always be so fortunate. Guard in future against all forms of milk-spilling."

When Thomasina had gone and she had finished her washing up, she came back to the kitchen and was standing looking somberly at the sleeper, when suddenly something in his expression changed and a moment after he opened his eyes and looked at her.

"Yes, I have been awake," he said. "I awoke when that girl knocked at the door, and I 've been awake since. I was too miserable to move, so I pretended I was still asleep. Mean of me, was n't it? I have heard virtually all you 've said. I got up and listened just now too."

At this she came forward, and taking one of his hands in hers she patted it gently while he remained motionless, looking up at her with hopeless eyes.

"I 'm glad, sir," she said. "For now you know that I know something of what is troubling you, and that I understand."

"Don't be hard on her," he said. "She meant to be kind. It was I that mistook——" He broke off suddenly.

"You saw how I received her letter," he went on after a moment. "You see—we had met long since—when she was engaged to some one else. I loved her before I knew, but I should have loved her in any case. I shall always love her, Wintergreen. But I had thought she was married long ago, and when I heard that

she had broken it off—that she was here—that she actually wanted to see me—I was insane enough to think. But I might have known it was not for me she had come, but for Adair—the beautiful youth.

"Oh, who knows? Perhaps not, sir," said Wintergreen.

"For God's sake," he exclaimed, starting up, "don't you begin that cheering up, cheering up."

"I won't then, sir," said Wintergreen. "Honestly, I think you're right. It's Jack, as she calls him, that she loves. And more's the pity. That's what I think."

But at this his mood changed again.

"You think I am right, do you?" he said angrily. "Why should you think that? Why should she care for him more than for me? You think, I suppose, that, because I am as I am now, she could never have loved me. But I could have made her love me once. She cried when I went out of her life. She wept, Wintergreen; wept and sobbed."

"I would n't build too much on that, sir," she answered. "You see she would be so sorry for you. It is sometimes easier to weep for others than for one's self. And this letter she wrote—I would n't build too much on that either. That would be the same thing. She would only be trying to make up for pretending not to know you when you met here."

"Wintergreen," he exclaimed, "how did you know?"

"Oh, that's easy to guess, sir," she said. "And nobody would be sorrier than she when her plan failed. She would mean to see you when you called."

"If she did not, she is a fiend of hell!" exclaimed Gardshore. "She told me she would be in all afternoon."

"Well, so she was," said Wintergreen. "If you had waited——"

"Waited!" he cried. "Waited while Adair was in? Waited to take my turn after Adair?"

"Would you have preferred to be shown in while he was there?" said Wintergreen. "Would you have preferred him to be told you were there? My dear boy, don't you see that she was sparing you?"

"Sparing me?" exclaimed Gardshore. "Sparing me? Do you call that sparing?"

"Yes, I do," said Wintergreen. "And nobody would be sorrier than she that you did not come, for I gather that she does not know you ever came."

"And never shall!" exclaimed Gardshore.

"Very well," said Wintergreen. "All the same I am sorry for her. It was unfortunate for you both that the other came in just then. She would be really anxious to see you alone yesterday."

"You think so?" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "she would be really anxious to have peace to get the whole thing wound up."

At this he laughed aloud in spite of himself.

"Wintergreen," he said, "you must have been a shocking flirt. But there is something about you—what is it?—that makes me feel in some insane sort of way that all is not over yet. I believe the feeling is quite misleading—like a will-o'-the-wisp. But I think that if I were at the point of death you could still make me laugh and want to get up."

"Oh, yes, sir," she answered, "but that 's because it 's in yourself that will-o'-the-wisp, as you call it."

"But you call it up," he retorted. "You let me know

it 's there, and it 's better than all the treatment in heaven or on the earth."

The bell rang again then, and for a long time there was silence between them, while he watched her go to and fro. At last, however, when she was making up rissoles at the table, he said:

"Why is it better—your treatment?"

"Because it makes you forget that you want any," she said at once, as though there had been no interval. "It makes you know you don't want any. It makes your higher self remember and wake up and take the poor, miserable, despicable, distraught part of you under its control again."

"My higher self?" he said doubtfully. "What is that?"

"Nobody knows," she said. "But we 've all got it—the meanest of us, the most wretched—something infinitely great and powerful and unconquerable that only needs waking up."

"Oh, I know," he said dejectedly. "I suppose you mean souls and that kind of thing. But I 'm long past religion, Wintergreen. It 's no use to me. I never pray now, for instance. What is the use of praying—when I believe what I believe?"

"Then you do believe something," she said, mincing parsley as she spoke.

"Yes," he said. "I believe that there is a higher Order of Great Ones who trample over us at haphazard, as we do over the small creatures that creep at the roots of the grass. If these beings we crush at every footstep were to pray to us, would it make much difference? If the microbes on that parsley you are chopping were to pray to you, would you stop chopping for them?"

"No," said Wintergreen, "I should advise them to mind their own business and let me mind mine."

He laughed again in spite of himself.

"You would be a cruel god," he said. "Then I suppose their business is to allow themselves cheerfully to be chopped up?"

"Yes," said Wintergreen. "If they've anything immortal about them they'll survive it. Let them trust to that immortal thing, pin their faith to it, pray to it, and not to me, whose business it is to do the chopping."

He laughed again.

"Well, Wintergreen," he said, "I suppose you are aware that you are frightfully unorthodox, but one thing is certain, your religion does get down to the very depths."

"It would be no good to me if it didn't," she said. "There are difficulties that require emergency methods to meet them. You can't meet them on the level; you must either get above them or below them."

Here the bell rang again and put an end to the discussion.

The tea-party at the Fortescues' was not the only one in Cauldstanes that afternoon. Down near the harbor another was going on in the small white house with the black water-barrel at the door, and the red-tiled roof, which was the residence of the Dicks. Mr. Dick, being now on day duty, was unavoidably absent, but his wife was more than capable of doing the honors of the house. In the cessation of outside work which had followed her ejection from the Bow House she had been concentrating upon her home, with the result that it now looked as though an earthquake had taken place there which had

left everything at right angles to its original position. This gave her no concern, however. On the contrary she was rather proud of it, and in the center of the small space left for social purposes she sat in her glory with her bare arms folded.

The tea-party was not of a formal nature. Just two or three of the neighbors had dropped in. Only one of them wore outdoor attire—Miss Ping from the mixter-maxter shop next door. She had not come, however, from her place of business, but from representing her section of the community at Miss Pennifeather's meeting.

"An' I didna stay to the tea," she said. "I aye like tea at my ain fireside."

She accepted nevertheless the cup which Mrs. Dick pressed upon her, and the scone which another guest handed to her.

"Ay, an' how did ye get on?" said her hostess, settling herself more comfortably in her chair. "Miss Pennifeather would be yatterin' to ye a' at an awfu' rate."

"Ay," said Miss Ping, taking off her hat, for the elastic had been hurting her all the afternoon. "Ay, I had had enough by the time the tea cam' on. Ye 'll no' believe 't, but I wasna pit on a single subcommit*tee!* Efter a' I did for the jumble sale! Faix if it had been Miss Scoresby was pit oot as weel 's me."

"Miss Scoresby?" exclaimed a chorus of voices. "Miss Scoresby pit oot? Never, surely?"

"Ay," said Miss Ping, "an' they 've pit on a young woman for secretary that has nae qualification for 't but impidence, sae far as I can see."

"What 'n a young woman 's that?" said Mrs. Clapperton, who had entered as Miss Ping began to speak. "Ay,

Jane, I will tak' a cup. Nae sugar though. I brocht my ain sugar wi' me."

"It 's a Miss Carmyle," said Miss Ping. "Faix she 's no backward i' the speakin'! She has the gift o' the gab. But Miss Scoresby held her ain."

Here Miss Ping gave a vivid description of the nominations.

The company laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks.

"Ay, an' they 'll be sorry afore they 've done wi' 't," said Mrs. Dick, wiping her eyes. "Mrs. Adair 's no' naething in the business line, an' this Miss Carmyle 's a queer lass. They tell me she 's aye fleein' aboot wi' the doctor. An' Fortescues' Davina was doon last nicht seein' me, an' she heard them sayin' to ane anither ae nicht that the doctor had kent her owre weel in India. A bonny-like thing a young man awa' frae his wife takin' up wi' a strange woman. An' how can he attend to his wark when he 's aye fleein' aboot like a whitterick? Eh, I wish Dr. Tully was back again. He took a bit dram maybe, an' wasna aye jist himsel', but I would rayther ony day ha' a doctor that was a drinker than ane that was a gallivanter."

"Ay, his wife, puir crater, had better look oot," said Mrs. Clapperton. "The doctor was at Longshaws himsel' the ither night. He cam' walkin' in wi' Miss Carmyle, an' stayed to his denner when Mistress Rutherford was oot. I was there mysel' at the time washin' up, so I ken. An' anither queer thing, Jane! Miss Carmyle sends letters to yon Wintergreen. I took a letter to her frae Miss Carmyle mysel' when I went hame that nicht."

"Mary Clapperton," said Mrs. Dick, hitting the table with her clenched fist so that the cups rattled, "what did

I tell ye? When Wintergreen cam' to the Bow Hoose, says I, she 's no' what she appears to be. I 'll no' bide wi' her."

Mrs. Dick's hearers received this new version of the ejection in polite silence; all except one woman, a new-comer, who said:

"But I thocht, Mistress Dick, that ye *had* to clear oot?"

"Ay, had I," replied Mrs. Dick. "Ony decent woman would ha' had to done the same."

"Ay," said Mrs. McAllister, who was another guest. "An' for a' her years she 's an awfu' ane for the men. Ye should ha' heard Alexander's impidence to me aboot coffee-beans. Jist because she 'd sent him oot to get them."

"Ay, an' it 's a queer thing," said Mrs. Dick. "I 've thocht aboot it aince or twice, since ye tauld me aboot Miss Carmyle. She cam' to Longshaws an' Wintergreen cam' to the Bow Hoose the very same nicht. Is that no' a queer thing?"

"Ay, that 's so," said Mary. "It *is* queer when ye come to think o' 't. An' they bit notes passin'. If I was Mistress Adair I wouldna pit up wi' 't."

The subject dropped then, but when the new-comer and others less intimate had taken their leave, Mrs. Dick, Mrs. Clapperton, and Miss Ping drew in their chairs again, and presently the conversation returned to this very point.

"I 'll bet ye onything Mistress Adair wouldna pit up wi' 't if she was aware o' a' that 's takin' place," said Mrs. Clapperton. "She would drum that Wintergreen to the door. I 've a guid mind to let her ken mysel'."

The idea was like fire to tow.

"What d' ye say to *let* her ken?" said Miss Ping. "It would be an act o' kindness."

"No me," said Mrs. Dick. "I 'm no' gaun near the Bow Hoose."

"There would be nae need to gang near 't," said Miss Ping. "We could write a letter withoot a name an' in print so 's the writin' wouldna be reconnized."

"I 'm game!" cried Mrs. Clapperton. "An' mak' it that nippy that Mistress Adair 'll set her fleein' oot o' Cauldstanes! Auld limmer! Spilin' a guid place for better folk!"

"Print awa' then, Ceely," added Mrs. Dick. "An' I 'll mask anither cup o' tea to ye. There 'll be plenty time to get it done afore Dave comes hame. An' Mary there 'll tak' it up an' pit it in the box in the passin'."

"I 'll awa' to my shop for some paper then," said Ceely. "An' a pen an' ink."

"*Red* ink, Ceely!" said Mrs. Clapperton.

"Ay, red ink, Ceely!" echoed Mrs. Dick. "It 'll mak' it look mair scorchin'-like!"

As soon as she had been able to slip away from the meeting Alice had fled across the street again to adjust her thoughts. It had been an awful afternoon. It had seemed to her as she sat in the crowded drawing-room with all eyes, as she imagined, fixed upon her and all minds busy with her affairs, that her visions of the other evening had all come true and were in reality worse than she had ever imagined. The faces she had pictured were more terrible when they were actually present. She remembered especially Miss Clara's peering at her from her corner, Miss Scoresby's contemptuous and hostile, Ada

Apsley's frankly curious. She felt as though she never could confront them again. Yet she must go on with that dreadful secretaryship to the end now. If she gave up now they would all say that it was because of Jimmy. She went into the drawing-room, which overlooked the street, and looked out to see if the meeting had dispersed. She wanted to see Jimmy leave. She had stayed behind to help Miss Pennifeather. But they had not wanted her. She had offered to stay too, and had been dismissed.

"You are sure to be wanted at home, my dear," Miss Pennifeather had said. "You must have so much to do at the Bow House."

The words repeated themselves in her mind as she sat there doing nothing. She had always had so much to do before. Now there seemed to be nothing worth doing. What was the use of fussing when Jack noticed nothing? For herself she did not care a straw now whether the house went to rack and ruin.

At that moment she heard Wintergreen moving about downstairs, and remembered that it was mainly because of her that she had nothing to do now. What an amount that woman did! How splendidly she kept the house, never resting, never ceasing to work at something or another, steadily going on through thick and thin, while she was present or while she was absent. Truly she was a wonder. She had not belied her own report of herself.

With compunction Alice realized how little she had done to help her, how little interest she had shown in her work. She had simply been slacking all the time; or so it must have seemed to Wintergreen. She resolved there and then to go down and look through the rooms to see if there were really nothing to be done. There must be masses of mending to do anyhow.

As she went she saw everywhere evidences of the new régime. The dusty dimness into which the house had sunk under her own and Mrs. Dick's management had for the most part already disappeared. The mad clock on the stairs had been polished up and set to the right time.

How much had been accomplished in how short a space! A sense of refuge and repose began to steal over her as she found some sewing in the dining-room and sat down. The knowledge that capability and devotion to duty were in the house there with her was in itself a rest.

In Wintergreen at least, it seemed to her, she could confidently trust. In this human relationship there would be no storms of passion, no agonies of doubt and fear, only quiet refreshment. The evening passed on to supper-time, and still she sat sewing in the dining-room. She was no bad needle-woman, and, once fairly started, she soon became interested in her work. She became keen to finish it that night, and could hardly bring herself to stop when supper came in at the usual time, though Jack had not yet appeared. Her new approbation of Wintergreen did not cause her to enter into conversation with her. She was aware of her, however, as she moved about the room, with something of Gardshore's pleasure in her mere presence.

Her work was finished at last and she was wondering what she should do next, when Wintergreen came in again.

"I found this just now in the box, madam," she said, presenting a letter on a salver.

She left the room and Alice looked at the letter.

It had no stamp or postmark on the envelope, and the

address was printed in pale ink. Inside there was a sheet of paper covered with printing in red ink. Both printing and spelling were execrable, but quite legible.

"Mrs. Adair is hereby informed," the letter ran, " that there is living in her house under the name of Wintergreen one who has no right to be there, one who is not what she appears to be, one who is a spy and a go-between set there by her enemies, who is a wolf in sheep's clothing, a wicked wretch, hiding under a cloak of goodness. Let Mrs. Adair beware, and rid her house as soon as possible of this snake that is worming herself into her affairs in the darkness.

"This is from one who knows."

CHAPTER XIII

In which Wintergreen perceives the Imminence of Another Occasion

ALICE had read the letter in red ink twice over before she took it in. At the third reading, however, its full meaning dawned upon her, and it was as though, stepping on to a pleasant field, she had found it to be a quagmire into which she had suddenly sunk up to the neck. It seemed at that moment as though this were the worst thing that had yet happened to her. It was incredible. But no; after what had happened to Jack anything could be believed. Everything and anything was possible. The foundations of the world were rotten. And this new misfortune was so thorough, so dire, so far-reaching. Who were those enemies to whom the letter referred? She was afraid to think. In the house with her besides Wintergreen were only Jack and Gardshore. Gardshore was out of the question, as he was out of all else, a mere shadow of a man hovering on the outskirts of life. Jack? Jack an enemy? Was this possible? Yet who else was there? And Jack was bewitched, enthralled by that woman with her beauty and her ready tongue and her quick wit that had dominated everything that afternoon, that had made her—Alice—seem more than ever a nonentity, a schoolgirl, a fool, before all these people. Oh, if she had only never come!

Then suddenly she remembered also, as Mrs. Clap-

perton had done, that Jimmy's coming had coincided with Wintergreen's. They had arrived on the same night. Had they both been at Brakely then? Had Jack met them both? Cold horror began to creep over her. Abysses seemed to be opening up before her. All the dreadful tales she had heard or read of trusting wives and beglamored husbands and skilful go-betweens came wreathing round her into the quiet cozy room like stifling mists from a nether world.

She had thrust the letter into the fire as soon as she had read it for the last time, but it seemed to be burned into her memory. It seemed to be written in letters of flame on the very walls. She was afraid to go upstairs lest she should see it written there. The whole Bow House at that moment seemed to be one of those enemies who were ranged against her in her loneliness. Even the ticking of the clock seemed to have in it something sinister, as though it were relentlessly marking progress toward some dreadful calamity.

Drawing her chair close to the fire, she sat trembling and listening, waiting for she knew not what, afraid to see Wintergreen again, afraid that Jack would come in, afraid to move from where she was. Sounds from the street came to her as she sat there, cheery sounds of people laughing and talking together as they passed outside the gate. Now a door banged, now a window closed. Houses were being shut up for the night, happy homes haunted by no witches with red hair in beautiful gray garments and voices full of laughter and everything else that made a fool of you, infested by no familiar spirits in black caps and gowns and white aprons that seemed to be angels of light and yet were snakes in the darkness. A deeper sense of isolation came upon her as

she heard the homely sounds of shutters being put up and doors slamming and people calling good night to each other. But soon these sounds ceased also. Only an occasional footstep passed in haste, and then there was silence save for the wind whining in the chimney and the sea rolling in upon the beach. This last was the worst. It had made her afraid often before when Jack had had to go out at nights. It had seemed so fearsome and so near behind the row of houses opposite. It had seemed to her as though death were lurking there, separated from her only by that slight barrier. When Jack had been there the thought of it had added a touch of passion to her happiness, of defiance, of recklessness. Now as she sat alone—more alone than she had ever been—it seemed to be calling to her, mocking her, defying her.

Then suddenly across everything the telephone bell rang. It startled her as a stab might have done, but she did not rise from her seat, and presently the kitchen door opened softly and Wintergreen's firm step sounded outside. Breathlessly she listened while Wintergreen spoke. Next moment the door opened.

"Miss Carmyle for you, madam," Wintergreen said.

"I won't answer, I won't answer!" Alice felt inclined to shriek. But Wintergreen had gone away. She went out and took up the receiver.

"Hallo," she said faintly. It sounded like a whisper at the other end. But Jimmy was listening hard.

"Hallo?" she answered at once. "Is that you, Mrs. Adair? I forgot to say to-day in all the turmoil how sorry I was to have missed you when you called yesterday. May I come to-morrow and have a talk with you about this fête? It 's no good attempting to discuss things quietly when Miss Pennifeather is about, and we must

get things fixed up, arrange what you have to do and what I have to do, before we get to work."

"Oh, yes, certainly," Alice found herself saying in reply. She felt as though it were some one else speaking with her voice. "Oh, yes, of course; I should have arranged it this afternoon. Will you come to tea to-morrow, and then we can talk things over?"

"Thanks very much," was the reply, "but I can't come to tea to-morrow. I have arranged with Mr. Rutherford that he is to take me in the runabout all around the country to see people about the produce-stall. But may I come in the morning if you are not too busy?"

"Certainly," Alice found herself saying again. "I shall be delighted. Just come when it suits you."

"Very well," said Jimmy. "Ten o'clock then. The sooner we get going the better. And perhaps you might tell Ja—Dr. Adair to do what he can for us when he is going round among his patients."

Alice had heard only one word of this last speech. At least only one remained with her.

"She was going to say Jack," she said to herself as Jimmy rang off. "She calls him Jack when they are alone together."

Having forgotten all the remainder of the speech she did not tell Jack.

"That's a pity," said Jimmy, when next day she discovered this. "But never mind, I'll tell him when he comes to-night to practice. By the way, I was to ask you from Mrs. Rutherford if you would come too. We're to dine at eight as Mr. Rutherford and I may be late, and then have the minuet afterwards."

"The minuet?" exclaimed Alice.

"What, haven't you heard of it?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Well that's too bad of Jack! You don't mind my calling him that, do you? You see we got so used to it at Alimara. Honestly, you don't mind, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Alice.

"And I may call you Alice, may n't I?" Jimmy went on. "And do call me Jimmy. You see we have heard so much about each other. It seems natural, does n't it?"

"Oh, yes," said Alice.

With Miss Pennifeather she had felt as though she were shooting rapids. With Jimmy she felt as though she were the tail of a kite being blown hither and thither in a genial wind, regardless of all the considerations of the earth, and totally in ignorance of where she would land next.

"But about that minuet," Jimmy went on, lighting another cigarette. She had already smoked two since she came that morning while she sat discussing and scribbling and arranging. "It's a ripping thing by Massanet, called 'Marquise.' And Jack does look jolly in it; you 'll love to see it!"

"But—but do you mean—does he dance it?" asked Alice faintly.

At this Jimmy laughed aloud.

"What else could he do with it?" she asked. "You know—poor dear—he can't sing for nuts."

And she did not apologize this time either. She had not noticed that there was anything to apologize for.

But Alice rose from her seat.

"Well, I am sorry," she said stiffly. "Will you tell Mrs. Rutherford I am sorry! I can't come to dinner to-night. I—I have another engagement."

"Oh, but that's a pity," said Jimmy, knocking the ash

off the end of her cigarette. "Is it very important? Could n't you get off?"

"No, I 'm sorry," said Alice.

"Oh, well, another time," said Jimmy. "We 'll be having lots of practices, I dare say. I wish you could have sung it. That would have been splendid. But Ada Apsley does it really well."

"Oh, Ada Apsley sings it, does she?" said Alice, thinking of Ada's hateful, curious face.

"Yes, and it is she who insists on our doing it," said Jimmy. "You see she is arranging the concert. She rang me up last night. She sang it for me and Mr. R. the other night, and quite inspired us both. I wanted Mr. R. to do it. It would have been the sensation of the day: the laird of Langshaws in old rose and silver—they have a lovely costume at Longshaws,—but Mrs. R. won't hear of it."

"And neither will I hear Jack doing it!" Alice had almost shrieked. "It 's much worse for Jack doing it than for old Mr. Rutherford." But she held her peace though she was seething inwardly. What was the use speaking with every one of them against her—Jack most of all. It was all arranged evidently, fixed up, settled, and again he had not told her. Now that she thought of it she had heard him speaking at the telephone the night before, after she had gone to bed. The other speaker had been Ada Apsley, but Alice did not know this. To her distracted imagination she appeared caught in a web of mysteries and surprises.

One thing was certain, however. Whatever Wintergreen might be—go-between, wolf, familiar spirit,—she could not now do without her. Without her the Bow House not only as a dwelling but as a base for Jack's

work, would literally go to rack and ruin. For though Alice had been dismissed from the supreme councils on that first evening because of her supposed occupations, no more thought was taken for them afterwards. Miss Pennifeather became her sole occupation. Not that she did much when Miss Pennifeather was actually present, but to all the numerous subcommittee meetings she had to go and take notes for the benefit of her chief. As these were generally so badly written that only she herself could read them she had to copy them again when she got home in order that Miss Pennifeather might consult them. Thus without being actually present that lady was kept in touch with everything. Alice was a secretary after her own heart. Jimmy, however, was another matter.

When she had finished with the arrangements for the fête, Miss Pennifeather, as she said, hardly knew them again. If they wanted fresh air they certainly had it in full measure. No one who took part in them will ever forget those committee meetings.

Certain it is, however, that never had there been such enthusiasm in the neighborhood, such curiosity, such interest about anything of the kind since the war began. Like other women in history who have raised regiments and led revolutions for the sake of one man, so did Jimmy. She used in her campaign all the charm of her personality, all her tact, all her wit, and the countryside rose to her. She worked and laughed and persuaded and strove for success, not for the great company of the disabled, but for one disabled soldier. He was still there. She had seen him in the hall at the Bow House one day, and they had bowed silently in passing. Again they had met once on the road above Cauldstanes, and

again they had passed in silence. Well, anyhow, she resolved, if he will not speak to me he shall hear of me. He shall see that I care as little as he does; that if he thinks nothing of me, others do.

The thought of Gardshore watching coldly in the background spurred her on to greater and greater efforts.

Meanwhile the watcher was anything but the indifferent being that he was supposed to be.

"Wintergreen," he said one night a fortnight later, "I don't think I can go on with it. You may think you are curing me, but you are not, you know. It 's all very well to say show her you don't care and you will come not to care. It 's a lie, Wintergreen. It 's a fallacy. I passed her on the road to-day, and I have n't recovered yet. I felt better when I never saw her. At least I did n't feel worse. I could n't."

"Well, now that you 've reached the worst you may get better," said Wintergreen.

"You 're a pitiless woman," he said. "I sometimes hate you. If you had n't made me promise to wait a month, I 'd have been over the top long ago and dead and done with it."

"Now, I won't have that," said Wintergreen. "There is no compulsion in the matter. You know that, whenever you really want me to help you over, I am ready and willing to do it."

"And to despise me all the time for doing it," said Gardshore. "And yet you say there is no compulsion. There is a refinement of cruelty about you, Wintergreen, that would have been worthy of a grand inquisitor. You wound not the flesh but the spirit. You are like the vulture that tore the innards of Prometheus. I can find no language to describe you."

"Don't describe me then," she said. "Obey me rather until you cannot do so any longer. Then I 'll obey you, and I 'll promise that I won't despise you."

"Honestly?"

"Honestly."

"Then that 's a bargain," he concluded.

This was three nights before the day of the fête. The fortnight and four days had passed like a dream to Alice, a hectic nightmare, a cinematographic succession of scenes. The one stable point in the general chaos of her world was Wintergreen, and Wintergreen was a fraud, they had said. She remembered sometimes with a sick sinking feeling that afterwards, when the rapids were passed, she would have to deal with her. Till then she must cling to her, whatever she was, like grim death. She was at least an ideal cook-housekeeper. She was never out, never absent from her post, never late, always ready for anything, from breakfast an hour earlier to supper hours later. Nothing, as Alexander said, ever put her about.

On the morning after her conversation with Gardshore Alexander appeared in the kitchen. The motor was at the door, and they were going out again, but some one had intercepted the doctor and was now in the consulting-room with him.

"It 's yon Miss Ping from the Harbor Road," said Alexander in a subdued voice. "An' I want a word wi' you aboot her. I 'm thinkin' she may be up to nae guid comin' here. She 's been makin' mischief through a' the place aboot you an' the doctor."

"About me and the doctor?" exclaimed Wintergreen. "What do you mean?"

"I dinna richtly ken mysel'," said Alexander. "But I thocht ye was better to ken about it. There 's a set o' them there that 's a' agin ye. Mrs. Dick at the fore-front an' Mrs. Clapperton an' this Miss Ping. What they 're up till I canna tell ye, but it 's owre the place doon there that they 'll never rest till they get ye drummed oot o' Cauldstanes."

"Oh, indeed," said Wintergreen. "And what about the doctor?"

"Ay, that 's anither thing," said Alexander. "It may be waur for him than for you. It 's no' sae bad to be obleeged to leave a place as to ha' the place leave you."

"Oh, such people could not accomplish that," said Wintergreen. "I suppose you mean that they want to injure his practice. But they could n't do that any more than they could injure me. People like them are of no consequence."

"Are they no'?" said Alexander. "Ye would wonder. The ither nicht when the motor stuck I was workin' at it till mornin' an' couldna find what was wrang, an' it was jist some dirt that had got into the works. True or no' there 's tales fleein' aboot Cauldstanes. Is 't the case that the doctor 's gane daft aboot Miss Carmyle?"

"No," said Wintergreen, though her mind misgave her. "No, that 's an absolute lie," she added.

"Eh, I 'm glad to hear that," said Alexander. "A' the same, mind ye, I was young once an' fond o' the lassies mysel', an' yon Miss Carmyle 's as bonny a ane as ever I saw. But he 'll need to tak' care, Wintergreen. The folks is a' speakin' aboot him. An' he 's dancin' at the fête wi' her, at Pitcaple, I see. An' a' the countryside 's comin' to see them."

"Well, they 'll see a very pretty couple," said Wintergreen. "Evil be to him who evil thinks. As for you and me, Alexander, *we* must back our young master through thick and thin, anyhow."

"Richt ye are, Wintergreen," said Alexander. "I 'll back you onyway. An' ye 're richt aboot the evil thinkin', but I wish he wasna dancin' wi' her at Pitcaple."

They had both forgotten in the excitement of the interview Wintergreen's own share in the opprobrium emanating from the Harbor Road, and Wintergreen's mind was entirely occupied with the bulletin of outside opinion regarding Jack when the door opened and the subject of her thoughts looked in.

Seeing that she was there, he came in and closed the door behind him.

"Wintergreen," he said, "I want you to do something for me. A Miss Ping is in the consulting-room."

He paused.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"She came to me some minutes ago about what she thought a trifling thing," he went on. "And I have found that she requires immediate operation—a serious operation—if she is to be saved from—from suffering—and death. I think that we could be in time yet to do that if we could get her to go to the hospital now—if not——"

"Yes, sir," said Wintergreen. "I understand."

"But she is in terrible distress," he went on. "She will not hear of it. Of course I have not told her everything, but she knows that there must be cutting, as she calls it, and go to the hospital she will not for me. Yet that is absolutely necessary. It is too big a thing to do here. I can be back at two and motor her over

if you can persuade her to go. I am late now for another urgent case. I have seen how you can manage cantankerous people; can you manage this one for me?"

"I 'll try, sir, anyhow," said Wintergreen.

When he had gone she finished what she had been doing when he came in, and rather more carefully than usual. Then filling some cold water into a tumbler she drank it off.

"Now, come on," she adjured herself.

It was a kind of prayer, and repeating it as she went she left the kitchen, crossed the hall, and stood listening for a moment outside the door of the consulting-room.

A low sound of sobbing and moaning came to her.

So this was the dangerous character Alexander had announced?

It sounded more like a whimpering child.

A wail of terror greeted her as she entered.

Miss Ping, a little broken wisp of a woman, was sitting on the sofa, with her hat beside her and her face covered with her hands.

"It 's nae use!" she half sobbed. "I canna gang, doctor. I 've tried to mak' up my mind. But I canna gang. I canna gang. If there 's to be cuttin' I 'd rayther be as I am—I 'd rayther——"

Here she looked up and saw Wintergreen. Her gray face turned into that of a fury.

"You?" she exclaimed. "Wha sent *you* here?"

"The doctor," said Wintergreen. "He has been obliged to go out to another case. He told me to tell you——"

The fury changed suddenly into blank dismay.

"Gone?" she exclaimed. "Gone? He has given me up then?"

"No, no," said Wintergreen quickly. "On the con-

trary, he is going to make arrangements to come back for you at two o'clock."

"Oh, but I canna gang," shrieked the unfortunate creature.

"Very well," said Wintergreen quietly. "I shall let him know when he comes that you have made up your mind not to go. Well, I quite understand. All the same, I must say I think you are a brave woman."

At this Miss Ping looked up, startled.

"Brave?" she exclaimed hoarsely.

"Yes," said Wintergreen. "It 's much braver to face long increasing pain, ending in a dreadful death, than to face an operation which will be soon over, and during which you will feel absolutely nothing."

"Eh, he never said that," sobbed Miss Ping. "He never said that. He never said that I would dee."

"Nor do I," said Wintergreen. "If you go at once you may arrive in time to have the operation done tomorrow. I know it is easy for me to speak, sitting here as I am, hale and hearty, but as God is my witness were I in your place I would not hesitate for a single moment. I would run for my life as I would flee from a blazing house."

This time Miss Ping did not answer but sat staring before her with despairing acquiescence in her eyes.

"Is there any one you would like me to send for to be with you?" Wintergreen said then, risking a conclusion.

"Oh, no; oh, no," cried Miss Ping, warding off even the thought. "I 'd raither gang my lane. They 'd a' be speakin' aboot it. They would a' ken."

"I think you are right," said Wintergreen. "The fewer people who know about it the better. There will be no need for you to go home at all now. I can lend you what

you need and make any arrangements you want made."

She had expected another outburst at this, but Miss Ping sat motionless and speechless, like one who has been pinioned for execution watching without hope of escape the preparations of his captors. But though she was acquiescent she was not yet indifferent.

Suddenly with a wild cry she flung herself forward again, and with her head on her knees and her hands clasped behind it she sobbed convulsively in an agony of bitter weeping.

At this Wintergreen sat down beside her and put her arm around her.

"God help you, my dear," she said. "In His great hand we stand."

"No me; no me," cried Miss Ping. "I 'm a wicked woman. If I die under the chloroform I 'll go to hell straight."

"No," said Wintergreen, "not if you pray to the One Above to save you. Pray to that One Above. Call him Christ or Savior or what you will."

"Oh, but I 'm too bad; I 'm too bad," she moaned. "I 've sins to confess, an' I canna confess them."

"Confess them to God," said Wintergreen. "There is no need to confess them to any other."

Miss Ping did not reply, but after a time her sobs grew quieter.

"Come with me now," said Wintergreen at last. "I must go and look after the dinner. I can smell something burning now."

Miss Ping rose passively, and, carrying her hat in her hand, came with her to the kitchen.

Wintergreen established her in a basket chair, and for a long time there was silence while she went to and

fro, and her guest, exhausted, sat and watched her, sometimes sobbing a little but mostly quiet. At last, however, she began giving directions about her shop and her house, and the thought of her old life, over perhaps for ever, aroused once more the first agony for a moment.

"It 's a' very weel for you," she cried. "It 's a' very weel for you. You 'll be workin' comfortable the same 's ye are now in yer kitchen here, when I m——"

The last words were inaudible.

Wintergreen stopped stirring and set the pot on one side. Then she came and kneeled before the basket chair, and taking Miss Ping's two hands from her face said:

"No, I promise you that. I shall not be working then. The doctor will tell me the time, and I shall be thinking of you, praying for you."

"Will ye?" cried Miss Ping eagerly, with the tears rolling down her cheeks. "Will ye? For me? Ay, ye 're a guid woman. Will ye pray that I 'll feel nothing—efter —efter——"

"No," said Wintergreen, "for that would be no use, but I will pray that you may be able to meet bravely all that may be coming to you."

"Pray now then," said the woman. "I canna pray mysel'. An' I 'm feared to gang withoot a word o' prayer frae onybody."

"Father of Jesus Christ and this woman," said Wintergreen, covering her own face, "awake the immortal spirit in her, that she may be kept, in any valley of pain she may have to pass through, undismayed and unconquerable. Amen."

"That 's a queer prayer," said Miss Ping, drawing a long breath. "But it 's graund."

After that no more was said till Wintergreen had set

the dinner. Then she indicated another seat to her guest.

"No, no," said Miss Ping, shrinking back into her basket chair. "I canna sit doon wi' you; I 'll jist tak' a piece here."

So she had a piece there while Wintergreen to please her made a pretense of eating. Afterwards she took up lunch to Gardshore, who was writing and hardly looked up.

Alice was still out.

Then a small bag was packed with necessaries. Miss Ping put on her hat again, and the two sat silent, waiting. Presently the motor buzzed and whirred up to the front door. At the sound of it they rose by one consent.

"Good-by," said Miss Ping, looking steadily into her new friend's eyes, and holding out a bony, cotton-gloved hand.

But Wintergreen put it aside, and, taking its owner by her thin shoulders, she drew her towards her and kissed her on both cheeks.

Half an hour later when Alice came in at the front door Wintergreen, for the first time when there were things to be done, was sitting absolutely idle in the kitchen. She had not moved since she had sat down after waving farewell to the little veiled figure in the motor.

Even now she did not move immediately. The short interview with Miss Ping had left her indifferent to all lesser matters than dire physical catastrophe and imminent death. It worried her that Alice should come in just now. She had not expected her till tea-time at the soonest.

She forced herself to rise, however, and went into the

dining-room. Alice was standing by the table with a sheaf of notes in her hand, and Wintergreen was struck by the haggard pallor of her young face. It irritated her just then with the memory of her last interview in her mind. Why should a young woman with everything her heart could desire look like a tragedy queen? It was insufferable. It must be admitted that her tone lacked its usual suavity when she said:

"Have you had lunch, madam?"

"I—I don't know," said Alice.

At this she looked at her more closely. There was something extraordinary about the girl; an air of bewilderment—of stupefaction.

"Something fresh has happened to her," said Wintergreen to herself. "What have these young devils been up to now?"

"Or these old devils," she added, for surely Jack at least was innocent of any escapade that day. She reflected that those peering, lurking Fortescues—that tyrannical Miss Pennifeather—might have something to do with Alice's strange state of mind.

"What have they been saying to her?" she said to herself.

Aloud she said: "Then, madam, in case you have n't had it, you 'd better have some now."

Without waiting for a reply she betook herself to the kitchen. When she returned with a tray, Alice had sunk into a chair by the fire, and was staring before her, oblivious not only of lunch but of her presence. There was something uncanny in her fixed, unnatural gaze.

"Your lunch, madam," said Wintergreen, glad to break into this strange abstraction.

"Oh, thank you," she said, then looked away again at the fireplace and became motionless once more.

Wintergreen came close to her.

"Pardon me, madam, but you ought to have something," she said.

As she spoke she laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

But at this Alice sprang up with a strange cry.

"Do not touch me!" she exclaimed. "I cannot bear you to touch me!"

"I am sorry for that," said Wintergreen, piqued.

She had reached the door when an exclamation behind her brought her once more to a standstill.

"Oh, don't go away angry," Alice implored. "I did n't know what I was saying. I was tired. I beg your pardon."

"There is no need for that, madam," said Wintergreen coldly.

The apology at that moment seemed more offensive than the offense. She left the room and returned moodily to the kitchen.

"If I am not mistaken," she said aloud to herself as she entered it, "there is another Occasion looming."

To her annoyance there was a reply to her soliloquy.

"What 's that?" said a familiar voice.

And looking up she became aware of Gardshore lowering at her from the hearth-rug. His appearance at this juncture seemed more than she could bear.

"Mr. Gardshore," she said, "if you have any regard for me, do not speak to me or look at me again till after tea-time."

He stared for a moment. Then—

"I won't," he said. "And what 's more, I 'll make the tea, and take all the messages."

"Oh, nonsense," said Wintergreen. I 'm not so collapsed as that."

"No," he said, "but I happen to be in the mood for doing some wintergreening."

CHAPTER XIV

In which Private Affairs become Public and Vice Versa

FOUR days later dawned the day of the fête. The exigencies of the drama, alas, permit no adequate description of it. For the glories of the weather, of the grounds of Pitcaple, of the stalls, of the stall-holders, of the various entertainments, for the dresses which the notabilities wore, and for the manner in which they acquitted themselves, and for the raptures of the crowds who came, the local papers of that date must be consulted. Their reports are full, and enthusiastic as befits their subject. But just as in all other histories, however detailed they may be, there are always items omitted, and sometimes those of the first importance, so in the history of that day some things befell which have never before been recorded.

Jack arrived at Pitcaple that morning in a strange mood. For three nights he had hardly slept. His work had inopportunely been specially heavy during the last week, and what with taking part along with Mr. Pennifeather and Mr. Rutherford in the organization of the fête, as well as practising at odd hours with Jimmy, he was almost at his tether's end. He had hardly spoken to Alice for about a week, and had been so preoccupied that he had not noticed that she had, during the last three days, discontinued even the morning speeches. O' nights

she had always been asleep or apparently so when, dead tired, he had managed to come up to bed. In the mornings she had always been out of the room before he awoke. At times, but generally when he was alone, he had realized with a pang the separation there was now between them. Now and again, forgetting what had happened, he would think how he would tell Alice some piece of news when he got home. Then remembering the new conditions, another wave of bitterness would surge up within him, making the breach between them wider.

There was bitterness too of another kind in the thought of the other inmate of the Bow House. Gardshore—the man he had received with such keen interest and eager desire to serve—Gardshore too had turned against him. He seemed to hate the very sight of him, to shrink from the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice. It was deplorable. He had made him worse instead of better. His management of the first case that had been sent to him from the outer world had been a dismal failure. His pride and his ambition were humbled in the dust. But he could not go on with Gardshore. He must be honest about it, write to the professor, and ask him to remove him to the care of some one else.

Then as regarded Jimmy, she had become strange also. What it meant he could not conceive. He dared not think. But Jimmy was undoubtedly different. As he had looked over his list for the day that morning, and wondered how he could get every one in and the fête as well, the thought of Jimmy had strongly obtruded itself.

A scene of the night before had been in his mind. They had been at Pitcaple having a last rehearsal on the stage there under the direction of Mr. Rutherford. Then,

how it had come about he knew not, Mr. Rutherford had departed and he had found himself alone with Jimmy, strolling on the lawn in the dusk. It had been then that she had seemed stranger than ever yet.

"Jack," she had said suddenly, "shall you not be glad when this is over?"

"Yes," he had replied. "It is interfering with my work."

"Work?" she had laughed bitterly. "It is interfering with my life. I shall never get over it. It has been a wretched business."

"Jimmy," he had exclaimed, shocked not so much by the words as by the manner in which they were uttered, half defiantly, half despairingly. "Is something troubling you? Can I help?"

"No, no," she had said hastily. "Only forget—forget that I spoke just now." And she had made as though she would escape.

But on a sudden impulse he had caught her hand—her two hands—and they had stood looking at each other through the dusk.

"I don't think I can forget, Jimmy," he had said then. "Would it not be better just to speak out as we used to do?"

"No," she had said. "No, it's impossible. But thank God every day of your life that you are not me, Jack. Now let me go."

And he had let her go. But the thought of her had remained with him, and it troubled him vaguely even as he sat there looking through his list. This new strange Jimmy—what was it that had changed her? All his world, it seemed, was under a miserable spell, which altered everything, blighted everything.

Nothing could have been gayer or more light-hearted than Jimmy, however, when she had met him that morning on the door-step of Pitcaple, where, attended by several admiring youths, she was engaged in fixing up notices for visitors; or when he saw her next some hours later, the center of a throng of people; or later still playing clock-golf with Mr. Pennifeather. The little scene on the lawn the night before might have been a dream. Yet it seemed to him as her eyes met his that he still saw a shadow of it there. It would be just like Jimmy, he reflected, to hide misery under a laugh. Her merriment haunted him even more than her sadness had done. As soon as possible, therefore, he went back to Pitcaple, why he knew not, since he could not help her. But some vague idea of getting her to confide in him was in his mind when suddenly he saw her coming toward him.

"Jack!" she exclaimed. "You here again?"

There was a new strange gravity in her face, a kind of amazement also and relief.

"Yes," he said, wondering at her. "You see it's getting on for the concert. And I don't want it to be late —my part of it at least—I have to go out again afterwards."

"I see," she said perfunctorily, having evidently not heard a word he had said. "Well, au revoir."

Then she went on towards the house.

At the other end of the lawn, to his intense astonishment, he met Gardshore, who pretended not to see him.

"Damn the chap!" said Jack to himself in sudden violent irritation. "What has he come here for?"

Gardshore was just asking himself the same question. It seemed to him that he was more wretched at that

moment than he had ever been in his life. He was furious with Wintergreen, who had suggested his coming and had been the cause of it. He had been angry all the way up the road from Cauldstanes, where motors were always passing him and enveloping him in dust. They were all making a game of this—these people apparently—making an entertainment of their charity to their disabled defenders. They had to have good measure pressed down and running over of pleasure in return for their benevolence.

Faugh! The whole thing was wrong. But for these men now lurking on the outskirts of everything, maimed, broken, in body and in mind, these people now passing him, secure in their self-complacency, would themselves have been dragged through humiliation and suffering. The whole thing infuriated him. He thought of the last crowd in which he had taken his place—a khaki-clad, gray-faced crowd in the rain and mist and mud of a dawn in Belgium. And the fragrant fields seemed hateful to him, the calm sea beyond, the fair woods ahead, the sounds of gaiety, the songs of birds, the hum of flying summer things, the distant braying of the band, the voices, the laughter. It all seemed a nightmare, with the memory in his mind of that grim company of death, to see those so-called benefactors in the midst of their activities.

Slowly on foot he made his way up the avenue under heavy overhanging trees where the air was faint with the scent of flowers and stale with bad tobacco. Now and again he was jostled by other foot-passengers all bent for the same destination. More than once he paused irresolutely, but always he went on again.

"No," he said to himself, "now that I am here I cannot go without seeing her."

And then he had seen her in her straw hat and blue linen. He had seen her here, there, and everywhere—now at one stall, now at another, always the center of some crowd or group of people. She might have been a blue butterfly in a bed of flowers flitting from one to another in the sunshine—a being of a different sphere—so light, so sweet, so altogether adorable.

On a seat among the bushes half-hidden he sat and watched her, and when she passed beyond the range of his vision he sat dreaming of her.

So the day passed. No one came his way. He sat unnoticed, remote, aloof, on the outer edge of things.

Then suddenly as the dusk began to fall, without sound of approaching footstep, she stood beside him.

"Are you coming to the concert?" she said.

He looked up, saw her, and rose to his feet.

"Are—are you singing?" he stammered, trying to speak lightly nevertheless.

"Yes," she said in the same tone. "Now you can't refuse to come, can you? May I sell you a ticket?"

"Yes," he said, without thinking what he was saying, for her eyes were looking straight into his, driving him demented. "Yes, I 'll come."

Then in his madness, as he fumbled for his purse, another thought occurred to him.

"Will you sing 'Down in the Forest' if I come?" he added suddenly.

It was the first song she had ever sung to him, and he had begged her on that far-off night never to sing it to him again, never to destroy the first exquisite memory of it. She was silent now for a moment, and the glow faded from her face.

"Yes," she whispered at last, very pale. "Yes, I 'll sing it."

A moment later she had left him.

She had broken the spell of his dreary self-banishment, however. He did not sit down again, but moved off towards the terrace, and was on his way there when Jack saw him and damned him.

Nevertheless Jack followed him, and though he was stopped by one and another he at last came up with him in the entrance-hall of the house.

"Hallo, Gardshore!" he said, cheerfully ignoring the scowl with which his patient received him. "You here?"

"And why not?" said Gardshore sharply.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Jack hastily. "Are you going in to the concert? I am just on my way there."

"Damn you," said Gardshore under his breath. Nevertheless he followed him into the concert-room.

"Here we are," said Jack. "Still two places in the back row."

Gardshore took his seat in sullen silence. It was the seat he would have chosen had he been alone, but he resented Jack's thinking that the back row was the place suitable for him. He resented Jack altogether, his good looks, his cheerful self-confidence, his unconsciously patronizing manner. Above all he resented the way in which, when Jimmy entered third on the program, Jack leaned back with folded arms and fixed his eyes upon her. He seemed to Gardshore to have a possessive air. How dared he look at her? How dared he sit there next to him looking at her?

Jimmy too had been ruffled en route, and had just passed through a tiff with Ada Apsley.

"Do you know 'Down in the Forest', by Landon Ronald?" she had said to her.

"Do I know 'God save the King'?" Ada had returned. "But you are n't going to sing that old thing, are you?"

"I am," said Jimmy.

"Oh, nonsense," said Ada. "Sing it as an encore if you like, but I told hundreds of people to come and hear you sing, 'Madam Butterfly.' You must sing it first."

"I won't," said Jimmy. "I am going to sing nothing but the other."

"Jimmy!" implored Ada. "For goodness sake don't change now!"

"I have changed," had been the reply.

"Well, of all the obstinate devils," exclaimed Ada. "I won't play your accompaniment."

"You will," said Jimmy. "Don't waste time."

And with these words she led the way on to the platform. Ada followed frowning, but by the time they were in their places Jimmy had forgotten her. To her there was only one face in the crowded hall—in all the world—at that moment.

"She is nervous," said Mr. Pennifeather who was seated in the front row.

"Not her," said his sister. "What makes you think so?"

"Don't you see how pale she is and trembling?" said her brother.

"No," said his sister, whose eyes were fixed on the program. "James is going to be the next," she said to herself. Then turning in her seat she looked deliberately at the crowd behind them. "I thought so," she said then. "She is singing to a special audience. Dr. Adair is there."

"And why not?" said her brother sharply, just as Gardshore had answered Jack, and in this eddy of feelings adverse and otherwise the introduction of the song began.

And whatever Ada felt about it, never had she played more beautifully. The rustle of the forest leaves, the sigh of the summer wind was in her music and preparing the way for Jimmy's clear boy-like voice; the voice of a sprite it seemed—hardly that of a woman.

> Down in the forest something stirred,
> It was only the voice of a bird . . .

The whole audience held their breath to listen.

But suddenly the accompaniment plunged into deep chords and the voice too became suddenly human.

> Here in the morning of life I stand
> And I long for a touch of your hand.
> Here I stand . . . I am here at your door . . .
> We will wait . . . oh, my love . . . we will wait no more. . . .

Again the accompaniment sank into the quiet rustling of the leaves, the soft sighing of the wind, and the first phrase was repeated in the spirit-like voice of the beginning; but this time with the memory behind it of what had intervened.

"Jimmy," exclaimed Ada as they went out into the green-room together, "I had no idea you could sing like that."

But Jimmy did not answer. She stood listening like one in a dream to the thunderous applause which had succeeded the silence in the concert-room.

"You 'll have to go back," said Ada after a moment, as shouts of "Encore" began to mingle with the stamping and clapping.

"Jimmy," said Jack, entering, "that was simply magnificent. You 'll have to go back."

"No," she laughed. "I 'm never going back any more." And turning lightly on her heels she ran out into the corridor.

Jack followed her.

"You don't mean that, do you?" he said. "You remember there 's the minuet?"

"The devil!" exclaimed Jimmy. "So there is. If I had n't quite forgotten it. And it will serve to stop this recall. Tell 'em I 'm sorry but I 've got to dress."

She was off before he had time for remonstrance. He went across the green-room again and so on to the stage. The applause died down into the silence of attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "Miss Carmyle has asked me to thank you for your kind reception, and to tell that she is sorry she cannot sing again now as she has to dress for the minuet."

The applause broke forth again as he left the platform.

"Really," said Miss Pennifeather under cover of the noise to her left-hand neighbor, Mrs. Rutherford. "She seems to wish to show her domination over him at every turn. Why could n't she have sent some one else as her messenger? Ada Apsley, for instance?"

"I quite agree with you," said Mrs. Rutherford, "but do be quiet. Mrs. Adair is on my other side, and I thought she was going to faint during that song poor creature."

"Poor thing," said Miss Pennifeather. "But don't ask me to pity her just now. I cannot tell you how many things she has forgotten during the last few days; important, vital things. Heaven preserve me from having a secretary again like her!"

At that moment Alice, pale as death, rose from her

place, and, passing along in front of them, made her way to the nearest door.

The two women looked at her and then at each other.

"She could n't possibly have heard," said Mrs. Rutherford. "Not possibly."

All the same they felt uneasy but quite unnecessarily. Alice had heard nothing since Jimmy's song but the words "we will wait no more". She had seen nothing but the vision of Jimmy's rapt face when she sang them. These things and no whispers of Miss Pennifeather or Mrs. Rutherford drove her from the concert-room and forth into the moonlit night.

But the uncomfortable thought of her remained behind her. The desire for self-justification arose in the breasts of the two critics. At the first opportunity they went out on to the terrace and sat down at one of the little tables. Here, over cups of coffee, they discussed Alice fully, and Miss Pennifeather related in detail the history of her shortcomings as a secretary.

As no one was on the terrace but themselves, they did not observe the caution usually deemed necessary in speaking of others by name. Both voices, moreover, had a carrying quality. In the men's dressing-room, whose open window was just above them, Jack struggling into white silk stockings and satin breeches, distinctly heard them. At first the talk amused him as it came to him in snatches. He wondered idly who the unfortunate was who was being torn piecemeal, and anathematized by Miss Pennifeather as "the most egregious little fool, my dear, especially during the last few days."

At the same time realizing that it was hardly fair to listen unsuspected to what was obviously a private con-

versation, he went forward to close the window and thus make the speakers aware of his presence.

His hands were already on the window when he heard his own name, and suddenly realized that they were talking of Jimmy's song.

"Well, all I can say," said Mrs. Rutherford, "is that I thought it rather painful. She was singing to one man. That was very evident. And I could see the man's poor wife thought the same."

"Yes, poor Mrs. Adair," said Miss Pennifeather. "But really one cannot wonder at him. As I tell you, the last three days——"

Here the speakers rose from their seats and began moving along the terrace, lowering their voices as they did so to inaudibility.

This may have been because Jack had slammed the window down in a fury of futile rage. He had just sense enough left to prevent him shouting down to the two speakers, from leaning over the window to demand how they dared to talk like this of his Alice. All at once he realized that nothing else mattered. What they said about him was nothing to him except in so far as it affected her. How dared they—how dared they? Had it actually come to this, that because of him Alice was being publicly talked about, watched, discussed, criticized? They had been talking of her all the time then? They had gone away pitying her? He was furiously angry. He could have torn off his satin and silver again. He was boiling with wrath at those venomous women—at Jimmy too for having come to Cauldstanes, but most of all at himself. What was he doing with these ridiculous clothes on, making a buffoon of himself while Alice was miserable? He

saw her for the first time as she had seen herself weeks before on that first night before her mirror—the object of pity, the butt of comment, the center of a peering, jeering crowd, while he, her protector, her lover, her husband was dancing minuets with another woman, making an ass of himself—a hateful ass!

He cursed as he jammed his peruke on his head and tore the lace at one of the cuffs of his gorgeous coat.

"Good gracious, doctor!" exclaimed Mr. Rutherford, entering at that moment in his character of stage-manager, "do be careful with that *point de Venise.* What 's the matter?" he added, as Jack turned towards him, scowling.

"Everything," said Jack and strode furiously to the green-room.

The Marquise, already in her white satin, was waiting alone there behind the scenes. Every one else had gone back to the audience to hear the tenor of the evening sing.

"Jimmy," he said, "I 'm feeling rotten to-night. I don't believe I shall be able to remember the steps. I wish to goodness I had n't said I would dance it."

"So do I, Jack," said Jimmy unexpectedly. "I 'm quite off it too to-night. I don't even remember the first thing I have to do, and what 's more, I don't care either."

"Jimmy!" he said, amazed—even in his abstraction—at the light in her eyes, the flush in her cheeks, the heave of her bosom under the white satin.

"Do you think we might cut it altogether?" she said, and laughed.

But at that moment a thunder of applause from the

concert-room interrupted them, and Ada Apsley appeared.

"O you darlings!" she exclaimed whenever she saw them. "You do look lovely! Come on! Mr. Thorne is going to sing your minuet for an encore! He has a perfect voice and it ought to be sung by a man."

"All right," said Jimmy, leading the way. "Dance anything you like, Jack. After all, who cares?"

"Yes, who cares?" said Jack, and then, as Ada began to play, they stepped out together hand in hand on the platform.

Both afterwards wondered what that minuet was really like. Many of the steps they did were weird and wonderful, they believed, and never before witnessed in that courtly dance. But both being in an exalted state was probably a help. They danced instinctively like sleepwalkers, and the performance was a huge success. At the end they were recalled to the platform again and again, but Jimmy looked in vain for Gardshore, Jack looked in vain for Alice.

"Have you seen my wife anywhere?" he said to the stage-manager as they left the green-room together.

But no one had seen his wife anywhere since she had disappeared after Jimmy's song. She was nowhere to be found either in the house or on the terrace.

"No, I have *not* seen her!" said Miss Pennifeather testily when Ada met that lady in the corridor. "I am looking for her now. She was to have met me here for a committee meeting." And she passed on muttering, for she was very wroth.

CHAPTER XV

In which Wintergreen once more meets with an Occasion

THE day of the fête had made very little difference at the Bow House. If anything it had made it quieter. There had been fewer calls at the door, fewer telephones, longer periods of solitude and silence. Alice had been away since morning, Jack since lunch-time, and after Gardshore left in the afternoon Wintergreen was quite deserted. Her loneliness was emphasized and made more grateful to her by the crowds passing along the street on their way to the center of interest. Echoes of laughter, snatches of song, groanings of concertinas came to her where she sat secluded. She wondered sometimes, when she had time, what was happening to everybody—to Jack—to Jimmy—to Gardshore—to Alice.

Strangely enough it was Alice who occupied her most. As evening fell her mind became filled with the thought of her little mistress, and of the memory of her as she had started for the fête, wan and sad in all her bravery. How had she fared all day, she wondered. What had happened to her amid all the sunshine and noise and crowds of people with that sad, strange, bewildered look in her face? She had looked like that—distressed, haunted—for more than three days now. Wintergreen was convinced that no light thing was troubling her. She was sure of that. As she sat by the fire sewing, she worried

about the unhappy Alice, till in despair she laid down her work.

She began then to wander about the house. It seemed to her like a stage from which the actors had just departed. Gardshore's room, which was as usual very untidy, gave her occupation for a time. But afterward she was standing there gazing drearily at the sea beyond the red roofs aglow in the sunset when suddenly she heard the front door open with a latch-key. A moment after some one came stealing into the house.

It was Alice like a wraith in her lavender finery. Wintergreen could see her plainly as she came up the stairs below, panting a little as though she had been running or walking at full speed. Her wild eyes and her pallor contrasted strangely with the smart hat and frock. In spite of them she looked as she had looked on the day of the sea-pinks.

"Something more has happened," said Wintergreen to herself. "Something dreadful has happened to her."

It was evident, however, that, as on that former day, Alice wanted no sympathy. She went straight to her room and closed the door behind her softly, furtively, as though fearful of being overheard.

"She does not want me," thought Wintergreen.

But the thought was troubling, taken together with the fact that her mistress had returned long before she had intended to do so. She had said that she probably would not be home till midnight. Now it was barely nine o'clock. That in itself was alarming. Was she ill? But no; in that case she would have called her, would have rung her bell, at least, and told her that she was in the house. Besides, it was borne in upon Wintergreen that Alice's affliction was not of the body but of the spirit.

More and more the conviction grew upon her that something vital was happening there in the closed room, something which might be of infinite importance; and with this at first came a nightmare consciousness of her own helplessness in the matter. Then, as she looked down from her top landing, she saw a letter lying on the hall-table which had come by the afternoon post. It was addressed to Alice, but she had passed it by.

"Fortunately," said Wintergreen as she made haste to go down to the hall to get it.

Placing it on a salver, she then made for Alice's door and knocked. There was no answer in words, but an instant later Alice stood before her, ghastly, scared, half-defiant.

"A letter for you, madam," said Wintergreen. "And may I bring you a cup of tea or some supper? You are very tired—if you would allow me——"

"No," said Alice quickly. "No, thank you. I—I have to go back shortly. I only came—came here for something. I cannot stay."

"Very well, madam," said Wintergreen.

She withdrew at once, and Alice, closing and locking the door, went back to the occupation she had left.

She was writing a letter.

"My Darling," it began, "I must call you that once more. It is for the last time, and you shall never hear me say it again. I love you too much to stay on at the Bow House in the way of your happiness with one who is far more suited to you than I am. Before—when I did not know she loved you—I doubted, but to-night—now—I know she loves you, Jack. I could see it in her face—hear it in her voice. She will make you very happy, Jack, as I never could. And I too will be happy. Never fear for that. I am going to live with a friend of mine, who has often wanted me to come, a nurse in a hospital, where I can learn to work too, and be happy as the day is long. It is all

arranging itself. By the time you get this I shall be far away from the Bow House. And I ask you, Jack, not to seek for me. We shall be better apart—indeed, indeed we shall. After all, why should not men and women be honest with each other as men are with men? Why should any law-courts be necessary to free those from each other who have been comrades in any sense? Surely you and I at least, who have known each other as long as we can remember, should not require this. For me it is enough to know that you would be happier without me—to make me long to go.

"Good-by then, dear, for always.

"ALICE."

She finished this and then sat long in deep thought, her chin on her hand, looking past the mirror at the window. Then, rising, she took off her lavender dress and hat and put them carefully away in the wardrobe. At the same time she took from it the old black dress which she had worn on the day of her former flight, and was fixing on the old hat when she became aware of the letter which Wintergreen had given her lying on the table in front of her.

But at the thought of Wintergreen she stood stock-still, and all the old evil thoughts came surging back upon her. The woman was evidently watching her. She had seen her come in. She was inquisitive as to what she was doing now. She would watch again when she took her departure, see how she was dressed, see where she went. It would be necessary to change back into the dainty lavender again if the fiction that she was going back to Pitcaple that night were to be kept up. Well, so be it then! She changed back into the lavender, but as she stood again at her dressing-table the letter lying on it again challenged her curiosity, this time enough to make her take it up and look at it.

Then for the first time she saw that it was addressed in the same strange printing with which the letter in red

ink had been directed. Inside was a printed letter too, but this time in black instead of red.

"I, the writer," it ran, "of the former letter against the character of Wintergreen at the Bow House hereby retract it, and wish to say that there was not one word of truth in it. Wintergreen is a saint. You may trust her as you trust God.—From one who knows—and who may be at the point of death. These are true words."

Before she had gone half a dozen steps Wintergreen had heard the door being closed behind her and locked on the inside. This had angered her. So this girl whom she had served from the first evening of her coming until now, early or late, with all her might, was going to treat her like a common outsider? Very well. Then she might manage her affairs alone, as best she could. She —Wintergreen—would concern herself no more with them.

She went down to the kitchen again, and to show herself that she did not care a button what happened upstairs, she went on with her sewing, stolidly, for about a quarter of an hour. Then suddenly she gave it up. A terror had come to her of what might be going on upstairs in that closed room. Surely, surely all was not right. The memory of the pale, wild-eyed girl who was there now all alone with her trouble, whatever it was, would not let her rest. Yet to go again to her would be useless if she were in the same mood. And she knew she had only to ring to bring her at once to her side. The silence argued that she did not want her. Or was there perhaps something more behind it? It hung like a soft, thick, heavy curtain between her and the happenings up-

stairs. She began to long for something to break it—somehow, anyhow. Yet everything in the house—even the door-bell—even the persistent telephone—seemed to have joined in the conspiracy of silence.

Uncertain what to do, yet convinced that she ought to be doing something, she was standing debating with herself when she heard the locked door opening upstairs, then light, hurrying footsteps coming down the staircase. A moment later the dining-room bell rang. Hastening to answer it, she found her little mistress. She was in the old black dress which she had worn on that former day, and looked, as she had looked then, a hunted creature. Yet that strange dignity was about her too with which she had returned then.

"Wintergreen," she began almost in a whisper, coming forward as she spoke and leaning her hands on the table, "some weeks ago I had a letter—an anonymous letter—which made me very unhappy. It said that you, who had promised to be good to me, were all that was bad and untrustworthy. To-day I have had another letter from the same person which says you are a saint and that I may trust you as I trust God. I don't know," she went on, drawing her hand wearily across her eyes, "I don't know which is right, but I think at least that you can be relied on to do what you undertake to do, good or bad. Is not this true?"

Wintergreen bowed without speaking.

"And I think," Alice went on, "that the worst friend that ever was would not refuse to help me to-night. For I am going away, Wintergreen. I—I shall not be back. And it seems like death. People, whatever they may be, are kind to those who are on the edge of death. They do not betray them, whomever else they may betray."

"Madam," said Wintergreen quietly, "if I have ever served you faithfully I promise to do so now, to keep anything you tell me as sacred as though I were a priest and had heard it in confessional."

"Thank you," said Alice, taking a letter from her pocket. "It 's this—this letter. I want you to give it to the doctor when he comes back. If it were not given to him he might overlook it. He is so tired just now and overworked. Will you see that he gets it at once? I want him to know first."

"Yes, madam," said Wintergreen.

"And," Alice went on, "I—I want you to stay on here as long as you can—not to leave because I have left. He will need you just as much—when I go—much more indeed—for there may be trouble—you understand?"

"I understand," said Wintergreen.

"That 's all," said Alice, looking round her vaguely. "I don't think there 's any more to say."

"Except this," said Wintergreen, "that I would ask you to consider everything very carefully, madam, before you take this step."

"No," said Alice hoarsely. "I have done with thinking. The matter has been taken out of my hands."

"Is that possible?" said Wintergreen. "Have we not always a hand in our own destinies?"

"No, not always," said Alice. "I am doomed."

"Oh, no one is doomed—like that," said Wintergreen, a trifle testily. Anxiety was making her temper rise. "Neither, if one loves one's husband, does one go off like that. It will be a sad business for the doctor."

"But not so bad as if I stayed," she replied with sudden passion. "You don't know—you don't know what you are talking about, woman. And to me it would be

a worse doom than even the doom of banishment to know that he was tied to me against his will—that I had a hold over him, as they call it. Do you know why I am going now—this very night? It is because I have come to know that there is to be a child between us."

There was silence for a moment. Then—"Now I understand, madam," said Wintergreen.

"You understand?" exclaimed Alice.

She had expected outcries, expostulations.

"Yes, madam," said Wintergreen, "and I respect your resolution. But now, since you have trusted me so far, will you not trust me further and tell me what your plans are?"

"I am going to-night," said Alice.

Then she stopped short.

"Yes, madam," said Wintergreen. "But how do you mean to go? The last train has passed Cauldstanes. There is no train now except the midnight one from Brakely. Have you arranged with any one to take you and your luggage over?"

There was something fearsome in her calm acceptance of the situation. Alice, her wild eyes fixed upon her, felt small and feeble in her grip.

"Yes, yes," she said hastily. "That is—they are to meet me."

"But your luggage, madam?"

"I am taking only a bag."

"Very good, madam," said Wintergreen. "Then I will go with you to the meeting-place."

"No, no!" exclaimed the distracted girl. "No, no—I must go alone."

"Very well, since you prefer it, madam," said Wintergreen. "But there is one thing I must insist upon. There

is no need for you to go into your new life exhausted, worn out as you are now. You must have a good square meal first. I insist upon that madam."

"You insist?" exclaimed Alice indignantly, drawing herself up to her full height, while a bright flush glowed in her cheeks.

"Yes," said Wintergreen, "I insist. There are always two sides to a fair bargain. You have asked me to stay on here when you have gone, for months—for years perhaps. I ask you to stay one hour. If you will not agree, then neither will I. After all, why should I stay to share the discredit the Bow House will suffer when you are gone?"

"Ah, you are a cruel woman," said Alice bitterly. "You take advantage of me already. But to keep you for him I will stay—and eat and drink—but no longer than one hour, remember."

"It is now nine," said Wintergreen. "By ten you shall be free to go."

Then without another word she left the room.

"She has no one waiting for her," she said to herself as she reëntered the kitchen. "Or they are wondrous kind. Hours make no difference to them."

Meantime in the dining-room where supper was already set Alice paced up and down at first like a caged animal. But for Jack, at that moment, she would have made her escape. But by her own act she had bound herself to this place, to this woman who was to remain when she was gone to hold Jack's world together when she had abandoned it. And surely this one hour, when she came to think of it, was not an exorbitant price to pay for what this woman would be able to do for Jack,

with her capable hands and steady head, at what must inevitably be a crisis in his life. And there was an hour to spare—two hours—more probably. Jack would not be back from the fête till midnight. The concert had not been half over when she had left, and the minuet had been still to come in the second part.

But at the thought of the concert she sat down and covered her face. Again the words of Jimmy's song rang in her ears. Again she saw Jimmy's face as she sang them with her whole heart and soul. And presently scalding tears began to drop through her fingers, as resolve gave place to grief, and passionate determination to agonized regret.

Wintergreen found Alexander in the backyard, working in his shirt-sleeves at something underneath the motor.

"Has the doctor rung up?" he said as soon as he saw her.

"No," said Wintergreen, "but there is a letter for him —a very urgent letter—I want you to take it at once."

"Will it be a long job, think ye?" said Alexander. "Or will it be jist to come back?"

"I can't tell you," said Wintergreen. "All I know is that he must get it at once. And I want to send a note with it. You can come for it in five minutes."

"Very good," said Alexander. "But eh! I hope it's jist to come back. I'm fair done the night."

There was no answer. Wintergreen had disappeared.

When she reëntered the kitchen Gardshore was standing there.

"Well?" she said as cheerfully as she could.

"Well, I have been to the fête," he said. "I have heard her sing to him, and now she is going to dance with him. But I came away. I have had enough."

The words were spoken with indescribable bitterness. And as she stood looking at him in silence: "It 's no good, Wintergreen," he added. "Your cure is an absolute failure too. Every time I see her it only makes things worse. I am doing no good either by hanging on here. I shall never be able to do any good. I made up my mind on my way back. I 'm going over the top tonight. And I came here to ask you—once more—to get that coffee ready for me. It 's for a purpose. You understand. You remember. You promised."

"Very well, sir," said Wintergreen at once.

He looked at her suspiciously.

"Now no nonsense this time," he said. "It 's humiliation enough to lead up to a climax twice; but a second fiasco would land me in a lunatic asylum. This is to be the last night of my life. I mean it."

"Very well, sir," she said again. "I am rather busy just at present, but if you will go upstairs I will attend to you as soon as possible."

"You take it coolly indeed!" he exclaimed, incensed. "You are busy at this moment, you say. What are you busy at? Mending holes in table-cloths I suppose. Much more important, of course, than a man who is about to commit suicide."

"The sooner you go the sooner I shall be ready," she said.

"You are the most callous woman I have ever seen," he stormed. "But no matter," he added more calmly, "so long as you make that coffee soon."

He flung out of the kitchen then and she heard him

going upstairs, while she stood debating with herself again with one hand on the table. Then going to the dresser she took writing materials from a drawer, and sitting down at the table scribbled not one but two notes.

"Dear Dr. Adair," the first ran. "I have orders to give you the enclosed whenever you come in, but think that perhaps you may want to have it sooner. Yours respectfully,

"WINTERGREEN."

The other ran thus:

"Dear Miss Carmyle: I must speak to you for a moment as soon as possible on a matter of the utmost urgency concerning Mr. Gardshore. Come immediately or never again to the Bow House. Yours in great haste,

"WINTERGREEN."

Hardly had she signed her name for the second time when Alexander looked in.

"Here you are," she said, rising and giving him the notes.

"Miss Carmyle," he said doubtfully, when he saw the address.

"Yes, and drive hard," she said. "They may both mean life or death."

After Alexander had gone she turned her attention to the supper. Alice in the dining-room heard her poking the fire and moving dishes. The homely sounds brought her to herself and to what lay immediately before her. She was glad now that she had been forced to stay for this farewell meal. She would go out afterwards with no suspicion on the part of Wintergreen that her destination was not Brakely, but a deep pool beyond the rock of the sea-pinks.

She had planned it all on the day when she had lain there. She had decided what she would do if the worst

came to the worst. There were plenty of loose stones. She would fill her pockets with them and then plunge down amid the brown trails of seaweed and be for ever hidden.

Meantime they would all think—Jack and the rest—that in some other place she was living another life. After a time Jack would be able to divorce her for desertion. Every one would take his part. All but herself would live happy ever after.

It was a dreary dream, but there was enchantment in it too, as she sat there exhausted with weeping in the darkening dining-room. She imagined herself going through the soft gray twilight, down the path, through the rocks—and then down again into oblivion and rest and peace and solution of all problems.

She was so deadly tired. The sound of the sea came to her like a great hush-song from beyond the houses, dulling the acuteness of her grief. She realized dimly that she was experiencing one of the infinite moments, an interval—a pause—between the future and the past. Then all became confused and blurred, and she sank into the dim depths of sleep.

With Gardshore it was very different. He had gone up to his room and was making his preparations. The journal he had kept from time to time during the weeks which had intervened since the night he called the fiasco had to be folded and placed in its envelope. One last sheet had still to be added. But he delayed this in order that he might have some occupation at the last moments. Experience had taught him that these would be the worst. He feared a recurrence of what had happened before, of the struggle he had had with his lower self, and then——

He laid his sheet of paper on the desk and set the pen

and ink ready. But he had not begun to write when to his disgust he heard a motor whir up to the front door.

Opening one of the windows which overlooked the street he tried to distinguish it in the dusk. But he could only see that its driver had already left it.

"Ten to one it 's Adair," he said to himself. "It would be just like him to come in now upon me."

Anger overcame him again at this thought and at the thought of Wintergreen dawdling downstairs.

"And now she 'll make his coming an excuse," he said.

He went out on the landing trembling with irritation.

Far below he could hear a great sound of talking. But the kitchen door was shut.

"Some friend of hers," he fumed. "Detestable old hag, when she knows I am waiting here for her."

Then in desperation he returned to the room again and seized the pen.

"This is the end of my last day," he wrote. "I leave the earth gladly, but without hope, except for annihilation. I have done no good by lingering. I have prevented nothing. I leave the stage free now so far as I am concerned. They seem—I must admit it—made for each other. What matter to them broken hearts?"

At this point, as on the evening of the fiasco, he heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

Wintergreen at last. But he heard her this time with strange apathy. He laid down his pen. He was quite calm.

Not so the footsteps, however. Wintergreen seemed to be bounding up the staircase two and three steps at a time. Hardly had he noticed this strange circumstance when there was an impatient rat-tat at the door.

"Come in!" he said, looking steadily toward it.

"Arthur Gardshore!" exclaimed a voice trembling with anxiety and wrath and imminent tears. "How *dare* you think of wanting to kill yourself?"

Before him stood Jimmy in her white satin gown, scarlet, breathless, lovelier than he had ever seen her. And next moment she had caught up both his hands and pressed them passionately to her lips.

"What have you to say?" she demanded.

He had nothing to say it seemed, but—"Jimmy! How —why——"

"I 'll tell you *how*," she answered. "Wintergreen told me—told me everything because she guessed better than you. And I 'll tell you *why*—it 's because I have loved you always—only—— *Now* do you understand?"

As Jimmy disappeared up the stairs the telephone bell rang.

"What 's this next?" said Wintergreen as she hurried to answer it.

It was Alexander.

"I 've got Miss Carmyle," he said. "But I can't get the doctor. A man here has had an accident and he 's taking him to hospital with another doctor—one of the visitors—in the Longshaws motor. What am I to do now?"

"Follow him at once," said Wintergreen.

"But the orders is to stay here till he comes back," said Alexander. "I 'm at Pitcaple."

"Never mind," said Wintergreen. "Follow him at once, and what 's more, insist upon seeing him; give him the letter and tell him to read it at once."

"But he 's awful touchy when he 's workin'," said Alex-

ander. "And they say this man is very bad. He 'll be in a rage at me if I do that."

"He 'll be in a worse rage if you do not," said Wintergreen, and rang off.

She stood listening for a moment then.

A murmur of voices was coming from the top flat. Otherwise all the house was silent. She went and opened the door of the dining-room. Then a low ejaculation of satisfaction escaped her.

"Ah, that 's right!" she said, and moving towards the clock on the mantelpiece she turned it back an hour. Then she went and did the same to the kitchen clock and the mad clock on the stairs. Then returning to the kitchen she sat down.

"I 'll begin to make the supper when she wakes," she said to herself. "The longer it takes the better."

Then smiling a little she thought of her interview with Jimmy, who had arrived like a whirlwind in answer to her summons, having driven the runabout herself from Pitcaple, dressed in her white satin, with Mr. Rutherford 's coat flung round her.

"He 'll surely be satisfied now," she said to herself.

A weight seemed to be lifted from her mind. For the first time for weeks she felt at ease and happy. She looked round her shining kitchen serenely content. Then her wandering glance fell on the table and noticed the evening paper lying there. She took it up. She had not looked at a newspaper for many days, but in her pleasant idleness she began to read the first page—the advertisement page.

Then suddenly she sat up.

Her own discarded name was staring at her from the

middle of the first column, in the midst of six lines signed by Messrs. Carrick & Carrick, Solicitors, Rathness.

"Good God!" she said softly after she had read it once. Then she began reading it over again.

But before she had finished it for the second time another motor whirred up outside and a latch-key rattled in the front door lock. She flung away the paper and sprang up.

Next moment Jack entered, with white, set face.

"Where is she?" he demanded. "We were on the way to hospital and met Alexander on the road. He made me stop, thank God! Is she still here?"

"Still here, sir," said Wintergreen.

She pointed to the dining-room door, and the next moment it had closed behind him. In two strides he was at the hearth-side and kneeling by the sleeping Alice. But it was no good. He could not wait.

"Little girl," he whispered. "Little girl—wake up and speak to me."

Then gathering her in his arms he held her close. Waking, she found herself on his breast. With a cry she thrust him from her, but he only laughed.

"It 's no good, dear," he said. "It 's all over. You 've given yourself away completely. I have read your letter. I know you love me."

"You have read my letter?" she whispered, bewildered, for this was the Jack of the old years come back, and the realization of this was so strange, so wonderful, that suddenly nothing else seemed to matter.

He kissed her again and again in the old impulsive way.

"Yes," he said as she laid her head in its old place on the lapel of his coat. "You scared me out of my seven senses. But it 's worth it all to have had that letter!"

"Then," said Alice, dreamily, for she knew already without asking, "it is me you love, after all, and not that other, though she is so beautiful and clever and I am such a little fool? I don't understand how you can."

"Nor do I," he whispered. "But you see I can't help it."

She laughed for the first time for many days, a low, happy laugh, and nestled closer to him.

At that moment the telephone rang outside in the hall again, but neither of them heard it.

Wintergreen answered it.

"Hallo," said an irate male voice. "This is the hospital. Can you tell me if Dr. Adair is coming on here or not? Is the case he was called away to urgent?"

"Very urgent," said Wintergreen.

"Then am I to understand," said the irate voice, "that he cannot come on here at all? For if so I must get some one else."

"I should advise you to do so, sir," said Wintergreen. "He is not likely to be able leave this case for some time yet."

How they talked! There was no fire in the grate that night, but there was no need for one. Nobody wanted to brood. On the contrary they often talked both at once. They had so much leeway to make up. But after a time long pauses supervened. It seemed enough to be together there in silence, and Alice, listening to the sea as of old, thought of the rock of the sea-pinks and hid her face. For in all the talking there was one secret yet untold; the secret that had been a thing of horror and was now a wonder of wonders. She glowed in the dusk unseen as she thought of it.

"Jack," she said softly, "there 's one thing I want to tell you——"

And then suddenly the door opened.

"Damn!" exclaimed Jack under his breath.

They started apart as though they had been young lovers, when Gardshore entered, followed, to their intense astonishment, by Jimmy in her white satin.

They entered together indeed. Her arm was slipped through his, her hand was clasped in his, and both were radiant.

"Adair, old man," said Gardshore, "I 've just come to tell you—and you 'll be glad to hear it, I am sure—that I have completely recovered!"

CHAPTER XVI

Which begins with one Departure and concludes with Another

ON the second morning after the events last recorded Alice found the following note attached to her hot-water can.

Dear Madam: I regret to say that private affairs compel me to take twenty-four hours' leave. But everything is cooked and ready for the day, and I hope to be here again before breakfast to morrow morning. In the meantime Alexander is ready to attend to essentials and has been given full instructions. His nephew, he says, is ready to take his place as chauffeur should he be required.

Yours respectfully,
WINTERGREEN.

"Well, I never!" said Alice to herself. But when she came downstairs she found that the letter had been the truth and nothing but the truth. Everything was ready in the dining-room, and in the kitchen she found Alexander, purple with heat and anxiety to please, on his knees in front of the fire, making toast.

At sight of her he scrambled to his feet, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Do you know why Wintergreen has gone?" she said to him.

"No, m'm," he said. "But I 'm sure it 's all right."

"Oh, it 's all right, of course," said Alice with her old

gay confidence. That morning it would have been all right to her even if the Bow House had fallen about her ears. An hour later when she and Jack sat down to breakfast no more light-hearted couple have been seen anywhere. There were no miserable silences now, no bitter thoughts, no set speeches. After the meal was over they lingered still. Alice poured herself out an unnecsary cup of tea. Jack lit a cigarette, glancing perfunctorily at the newspaper as he did so.

"Here's a queer advertisement," he said, "that has been in the front column every day for the last week. A man has died leaving a million pounds to a Miss Julia Glenferlie, who saved his life at the time of the *Lusitania* disaster. And evidently she cannot be found. She has never claimed her money."

"A million pounds!" exclaimed Alice. "Jack, don't you wish you had it?"

"No," said Jack. "I 'm too happy as I am. I would n't change with anybody for a million!"

The prolonged and unaccountable absence of Miss Glenferlie had had a serious effect in Rathness. By the end of the first fortnight Mr. Carrick the lawyer had taken to sitting up reading half the night to avoid being tormented by bad dreams about his client. The dream he had dreamed on the first night of her disappearance was always recurring with ghastly variations. Sometimes instead of his finding her, she was finding him buried under the Scotch firs. It was very nerve-shattering.

"And very trying for me," said Mrs. Carrick when he complained to her, "to have you starting up six times in the night. One would think that *you* were the murderer."

From this it will be gathered that Mrs. Carrick, in spite

of all her husband's arguments, still held to her first opinion as to the cause of Miss Glenferlie's disappearance.

"You need n't say another word, Edward," she always said when he had exerted himself to the utmost to prove the contrary. "That old woman in the black veil that handed in the note was the murderer or his accomplice. Take my word for it."

As time went on, this conviction, though it remained unaltered in its main outlines, assimilated new details and acquired accretions. When the first letter came to Miss Glenferlie from Mr. Macfarlane Mr. Carrick triumphed. Here, he said, was the reason of her departure. The letter, which, it will be remembered, his absent client had ordered him to open and reply to, ran as follows:

Dear Miss Glenferlie: I fear my last letter may have miscarried. My unfortunate absent mindedness, the reason for which you know, may have caused me unwittingly to misdirect it. I therefore write again to say that on Friday first I hope to be in Rathness and to call on you the following morning, if I arrive too late to come that evening. You may ascertain the hour of my arrival by inquiring at the Crown Hotel, where I have taken rooms until further notice. I hear you have a telephone, so I shall ring you up in any case. Yours ever in the irrevocable bonds of the awful past,

JAMES MACFARLANE.

"I knew it," exclaimed Mr. Carrick when he had read this. "There is a man at the bottom of it. 'The awful past.' It looks as if she had been married instead of murdered."

But Mrs. Carrick smiled pityingly.

"Really, Edward," she said, "I wonder sometimes how people continue to consult you. You jump to conclusions without the least thought. Now I said from the very first that that old woman with the veil had an accomplice, and there 's nothing to prevent poor Miss Glenferlie be-

ing both married and murdered. Just think of that man in France quite recently who married half a dozen people and then murdered them straight off. What 's to prevent this man Macfarlane from being just such another?"

"Nothing," said her husband, "except the trifling circumstance that he is only announcing his arrival at Rathness now."

"That would be all right if we knew where Miss Glenferlie was," said his wife.

"Oh, bother!" said Mr. Carrick. "Well, anyhow, I 've got to answer the letter."

He answered it as soon as he reached his office.

"Dear Sir," he wrote. "My client, Miss Glenferlie of the Skellicks, Rathness, having been obliged, for reasons which I am unable to disclose, to leave home for an indefinite period, I have been directed by her to open and answer all letters which arrive for her in her absence. I have therefore to thank you for your letter received this morning, and to inform you that, so far as I know, no former letter from you has arrived here. I have further to inform you that, as her present address is unknown to me, I am unable either to forward any communications to Miss Glenferlie or to advise her of your imminent arrival. Yours truly,

"Edward Carrick."

"That will choke him off," he said to himself. But never was he more mistaken.

A reply came by return of post.

Dear Sir: Yours to hand, but in my opinion extremely unsatisfactory. I insist upon knowing further particulars of the reasons for Miss Glenferlie's absence. I have a right to know

the nature of the circumstances in which she now finds herself. And I *will* know them. Kindly reply by return. Yours truly,
JAMES MACFARLANE.

"Confound the fellow," said Mr. Carrick as he read this. "But after all he may have some rights. He seems very certain about it anyhow, and women are strange creatures."

He thought it best to reply, therefore, and did it by return as commanded.

"Dear Sir," he wrote. "I have received your letter, and in reply have to tell you that I am unable to state the reasons for Miss Glenferlie's absence because I do not know them. But I shall be glad, if you wish to investigate the matter, to do all I can to render you assistance.
"Yours truly, EDWARD CARRICK."

"That will keep me right either way," he said to Mrs. Carrick when he told her about it that evening.

"It won't keep you right, Edward, when everything is found out and it is discovered that you have been hand in glove with the murderer," she replied.

"Oh, bosh!" exclaimed Mr. Carrick.

"Very well," said his wife. "Only if you are arrested and taken to Calton jail for being an accessory after the fact, don't blame me, please."

The shape of Mr. Macfarlane mingled that night in the dreams of Mr. Carrick and next morning, when a telegram arrived from him in reply to his letter, he felt reluctant to open it. When he did so, however, his apprehension changed to irritation.

"Starting for Rathness," it ran. "Kindly meet trains."

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Carrick. "And he 'll 'be bringing detectives with him and what not.

Trains, too! How many trains pray? Does he expect me to spend the whole day at the railway station?"

"Don't be absurd, Edward," said his wife. "All you have to do is to look at the time when the wire was sent off and meet the train that starts from London nearest to that time. If he does n't come by that he will come by the next. The whole thing is a blind, of course, but it may be as well to humor him."

"What I hate is the idea of this fellow coming here and telling all Rathness that we have lost her," said Mr. Carrick. "Nobody yet has the least idea that her absence has anything unusual about it, but the moment this man comes the whole place will be in an uproar."

"It will be in an uproar anyhow before we 've done with this," said Mrs. Carrick.

"Well, for goodness' sake stop prophesying like Jeremiah, and look up the time-table for me," said her husband.

The time-table was brought while Mr. Carrick began breakfast, and it was found that the first train Mr. Macfarlane could come by was the 9:35.

"Just time to catch it," said Mrs. Carrick, and the lawyer, leaving half his bacon and all his coffee untouched, made for the railway station.

To no purpose, however. No Mr. Macfarlane appeared by that train, or by the next—or the next. After the arrival of the 6:30 the manageress of the Crown Hotel rang up, asking if Mr. Carrick had had any news of Mr. Macfarlane. He had ordered an elaborate dinner for two, it seemed, saying that Mr. Carrick would be dining with him. Should she or should she not go on with the hors d'œuvres? There were a dozen ordered, and nobody else would be wanting them that night.

"All part of the blind," said Mrs. Carrick when she heard of this. "A man who is capable of thinking of hors d'œuvres at such a time is fit for anything. He has probably done lots of other crimes and been arrested now on the way here."

This time she had spoken more truly than she knew. Mr. Macfarlane had been arrested, though not by Scotland Yard.

Next day a telegram came to the Crown Hotel.

"Mr. James Macfarlane died last evening."

"Surely this is the last of him now," said Mr. Carrick when the manageress sent it up to him.

But no. Next day a letter came to himself.

Dear Sir: I am instructed to inform you that our client, Mr. James Macfarlane, died yesterday of heart failure on his way to King's Cross. In terms of his will, dated the day before, he bequeaths to your client, Miss Glenferlie of the Skellicks, Eastshire, as a small acknowledgment of the inestimable service she rendered him in saving his life at the time of the *Lusitania* disaster, his estates in America, his flat in London, and the sum of one million pounds sterling free of death duties. Kindly inform your client of this.

Here followed the name of a well-known firm of London solicitors.

"I might have known it," exclaimed Mr. Carrick. "I might have known that he would barge in somehow. Now there 's nothing for it."

Next day all Rathness read the following advertisement in the morning papers:

Millionaire Legatee Wanted.—Miss Julia Glenferlie of the Skellicks, Eastshire, Scotland, is hereby informed that various valuable properties and the sum of one million pounds sterling have been bequeathed to her by James Macfarlane, Esquire, late of London, in acknowledgment of service rendered by her in

saving his life at the time of the *Lusitania* disaster. Her immediate return is therefore absolutely necessary. Messrs. Carrick & Carrick, Solicitors, Rathness.

The sensation this made may be imagined. Rathness buzzed like a beehive which has been stirred up with a stick. Miss Glenferlie a millionaire? And advertised for? Was she lost? What had happened to her? Was she not at the Skellicks?

Mrs. Carrick's drawing-room that afternoon was crammed. But no one gained any information there beyond what was already known. Mrs. Carrick made up for her discretion in the evening, however, when the unhappy Edward was her only audience. That night he dreamed he had been made into hors d'œuvres. It was the worst dream he had ever had.

A week passed and more, and every day the community pounced upon the morning papers to see if the advertisement were still there. People took to going to the Skellicks for their evening walk, and wandering round outside the grounds. Never had the road to it been so frequented since the late laird's time. It acquired a spurious gaiety. The Skellicks became a show place. And this in spite of the fact that the old Clackmannans at the lodge looked sourly upon all visitors.

"It 's like we were tigers in a menagerie," said Mr. Clackmannan to his wife one fine night, "wi' a' they folk stickin' like flees to the gate there an' rollin' their impident e'en roond a'thing."

"I 'm awa' up to Rathness to see Carrick aboot it," said Mrs. Clackmannan, who was of a practical turn of mind. "I 'll tell him we 're fair scunnered wi' publeecity. Wha kens but he may pit up oor pay?"

"Wha kens," returned her husband. "A'thing 's possible noo."

But it was not possible for Mrs. Clackmannan to see Mr. Carrick that night. He had been wired for in the afternoon and had gone to Edinburgh. At the very moment she was inquiring for him he was being entertained at the North British Hotel by the missing lady herself, in a sumptuous gray and green dinner-gown, and looking better than she had ever done in her life. But it must be confessed that though the food had been excellent, the wine of the best, and his client in her most genial mood, the lawyer's enjoyment had been tempered by his bewilderment, his appreciation modified by his curiosity.

Indeed toward the end of the meal he could no longer altogether restrain the latter, and, seeing this, Miss Glenferlie rose and led the way to a secluded corner. There, having seen her guest provided with cigars and coffee, she said:

"Well, now, what about this legacy?"

He had the papers in his pocket, and they went over them together.

"It seems all right," she said when they had finished.

"Oh, it 's all right!" he answered with an excited laugh, for the very naming of the sums of money and lists of great possessions, along with the other intoxicants, had gone to his head. So far out of himself was he, indeed, that against his habit he asked a direct question.

"And now what about your return, Miss Glenferlie?" he said archly.

"I am returning to-morrow," she said. "If you want me to sign anything I had better do it at once."

"But surely," he said, wondering, "that could wait till I come to the Skellicks?"

"I am not returning to the Skellicks," she said.

"Not returning to the Skellicks?" he exclaimed.

"No," she said. "I am tired of the Skellicks and of all that living there nowdays implies. I infinitely prefer my present residence."

"Oh," he said blankly, "I am sorry for that. I had thought, Miss Glenferlie, that perhaps your absence had something to do with—with the temporary lack of funds —and that now that there was plenty of money——"

"Oh, no," she said. "Money has nothing to do with it. I at present need no money, and my former income, when it has accumlated again and after all debts are paid, will be sufficient for all contingencies that may arise. I purpose, therefore, to devote this legacy to another purpose than my own emolument. I shall not need a penny of it."

"My dear Miss Glenferlie!" he exclaimed.

"The thought of going back to my former existence revolts me," she continued. "Its dull monotony fills me with horror. I have a nightmare-like remembrance of the boudoir where I used to sit hour after hour, cut off from the world of realities, reading the experiences and the lives of other people and missing my own life, sir—missing my own life."

"What in the world did she mean by that?" said Mrs. Carrick, when her husband was describing the interview.

"Goodness knows," said Mr. Carrick. "I have come back no wiser than I went—except for the instructions which she has given me to carry out."

"You have n't even her address?"

"Not even the address. When she wants anything she is to advertise in the 'Scotsman.' When I want anything

I am to advertise. We are both to examine the front column daily."

"Is she mad, do you think?" said Mrs. Carrick with round eyes.

"Most people will think so when they see her first advertisement," he answered. "But I am bound to say she seemed absolutely sane to me."

He produced a sheet of paper from his pocket, closely written in his client's neat, firm hand.

"These are the directions," he said. "I am to insert the advertisement at the end, in every paper I can think of. And the Macfarlane money is to be used to implement it. If necessary I am to engage new clerks to assist me with the correspondence. But I myself am to interview applicants, and it strikes me I shall soon be doing nothing else. I am to select those who seem strong physically and mentally. They must be gentlewomen in every sense of the word. They must have tact, sympathy, and a sense of humor. They must be keenly interested in the welfare of their country and willing to undergo severe training in her service. When I have selected fifty I am to let Miss Glenferlie know by means of the 'Scotsman' column, and send them to meet her on a date to be appointed by her, at the North British Hotel in Edinburgh. What she is to propose to them there I know not."

He paused.

"But the advertisement, Edward—read the advertisement," said Mrs. Carrick.

"The Order of the Martha Maries," he read. "Ten thousand vacancies. Rank and education no disqualification. Initiation free. All unattached, unoccupied women are invited to apply to Vert d'Hiver, 'Scotsman' Office, where they may hear of something to their own and the national advantage."

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